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THE TRACK OF MIDNIGHT.*

A tale of wild adventure in the Australian bush—The narrow escape of James Wilton and the new career that grew out of it for him—A mysterious outlaw and the perils attending his pursuit by the settlers—An ugly suspicion and an astounding revelation.

(Complete in This Issue.)

CHAPTER I.—A WHITE NOMAD.

JAMES WILTON was on his way back to Sydney from a trip "out back," and had a full load of wool and hides piled up on his heavy two wheeled dray.

Five years before he had come to the then little known land of Australia; for the time was prior to the discovery of gold, and it was as a convenient dumping ground for the convict surplus that Great Britain chiefly regarded the territory.

The rumored possibilities of obtaining large tracts of valuable agricultural and pastoral country had attracted Wilton from his home in England, and for five years he had been following "pastoral pursuits."

It had been a varied career, ranging from shepherding to putting up fences round the estates of squatters. Then he had tried carrying, and had traveled far into as yet unexplored country to outlaying stations, with his heavily built dray loaded with stores, bringing back to the baby city of Sydney loads of wool and hides.

Many were the tales of the dangers of the road in the far back country, both from the wild black fellows and the wilder white outlaws who, having escaped from the control of the jail, roamed the unsettled districts, and levied tax wherever they could, or slew the people who refused it. But so far Wilton had been singularly fortunate, and all his experiences of the rough and ready warfare of early pioneering were yet to come.

There had been a long spell of dry weather in the colony, but soon after he started with his load rain began to fall, and fell heavier as he proceeded on his way.

As he reached lower levels, evidences were more and more plentiful of the bad state of the country until at length he arrived at a place where a lot of soil had collected and formed a small flat, over which the water lay some inches deep. But it was not the water that disconcerted him. He knew that

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the ground below would be saturated and soft, and that the broad wheels of his dray would sink in it to the axles, and that his team would have to strain and work to the utmost to get the load across on firmer ground on to the other side. The track went right across the flat, and the dense growth of the timber all round utterly precluded the possibility of his making a fresh track to avoid it. He went on ahead and waded into the water, the soft, spongy character of the earth below warning him of the danger he ran of getting bogged if he attempted to drive his team across.

He felt the ground carefully as he splashed across the flat. The water did not reach to his knees, and he did not find that his feet sank so deeply into the mud as he had anticipated. Had he sunk up to his knees in the bog, he might have been satisfied that the dray would stick ; but as he only felt spongy turf below his feet, he was sure that his bullocks could get the load over safely. To wait where he was for the water to go off the flat was, to his mind, only trifling with fortune.

Swinging the long handled whip with its great length of greenhide lash, he cracked it and shouted to his team, till he had the bullocks going at a good pace towards the treacherous flat. The dray sank lower and lower at every stride of the team. Slower and slower was the progress made, until the axles were level with the water, and Wilton knew that nearly a quarter of the wheels were embedded in the mire.

By that time, however, the dray was half way across the flat, and Wilton, thinking the battle already won and feeling the effects of his continuous wielding of the heavy whip, allowed his team to rest. And thus he lost the struggle ; for as the dray stood with all the weight of the load pressing down upon the wheels, it sank bit by bit, until, glancing toward it, he saw that the axles had disappeared beneath the water.

He started at his team, using every means known to him to make each bullock pull its utmost. But all in vain. Though they strained forward on their yokes until they sank knee deep in the bog, the dray refused to move forward an inch, and at last, worn out with his exertions, he saw that darkness was coming on, and that his dray was as firmly embedded as though it had been buried. Angry at himself, his team, and everything else, Wilton loosened the animals from their yokes, and hastened towards dry ground in search of a place to camp for the night.

The rain, which had ceased during the day, now began to fall again. His food and blankets were in the dray, and as the first drops splashed around him when he was half way between the end of the flat and the dray, he turned back. He would camp under the shelter of the tarpaulin which covered the load, till the morning, and do the best he could with a nip of rum and some beef and damper until daylight. When he reached the wagon again he clambered up, and, taking off his sodden boots, wriggled under the tarpaulin.

By the time he had finished his repast, darkness had taken the place of light, and the rain beat steadily and monotonously upon the tarpaulin. He put the remainder of his provisions into the bag, and stretched himself out as much as the narrow, confined space would permit.

"Well, I'm safe here from floods, bushrangers, or blacks," he thought, as he drew out his pipe and prepared to enjoy a smoke before sleeping. When his pipe was filled he lay down with his head towards the small opening through which he had crept under the tarpaulin, and, with his tucker bag as a pillow, he took out his flint and steel to strike a light for his pipe. He raised the steel to strike when the silence of the night was broken by a sound that made him lie still and fearful. It was the sound of men shouting as they shout and halloo when they ride round a mob of cattle to "round them up."

He slid along until he had his head through the opening under the tarpaulin. The sounds of galloping horses came to him. He could also hear the cries more distinctly, and he shivered as he heard them, for they were the loud, hoarse shouts of the white man and the shrill, keener yells of the black. A momentary break in the clouds allowed a stray glint of moonlight to faintly illumine the darkness, and before it had passed, he saw what made him feel still more fearful. *

His bullocks were charging madly down towards the flooded flat, and surrounding them were quickly moving black figures, and behind them the figures of men on horseback. In a flash the stories he had scouted came to his mind. Only one class of white men traveled with the blacks, so rumor said, and those were of a kind worse in every respect than their darker brethren.

The transitory gleam of moonlight had passed and darkness hid the scene from his eyes; but the babel of sounds came to him and he knew that his bullocks were being slain and that soon the men he had seen would be seeking for him. And to find him meant at best robbery, or probably death, for to the men of his own color who were with the blacks the life of a fellow creature was even less than the life of a white man was to the natives. They, at least, had some reason for their warfare in the annexation of their country; but the white outlaws had none, and so were the more relentless and the more bloodthirsty against every one who had not been branded with the convict taint.

Wilton pulled the tarpaulin down closely and tucked the loose edge in as tightly as he could, and then crept back to the farthest corner of his crevice, dragging his tucker bag with him and wedging himself in between the bales.

Then he waited, reviling himself for his folly in traveling unarmed, in spite of all the warnings he had received from his fellows, and fearing what would follow when the attention of the men on the shore of the temporary lagoon was attracted to the dray.

CHAPTER II.—NATIVE REVELS.

HE had not long to wait. The noise of the shouting which reached him dimly ceased for a while, and then a cry nearer and clearer and an answering shout from the distance told him that his hiding place was discovered. He frantically tried to force himself further between the bales, and in doing so discovered that he could just squeeze himself into a corner where another bale lay across and, as he had thought, blocked the end of his narrow shelter.

At the same moment he heard a yell and a voice say something in a language he did not understand. He scarcely dared to breathe as he heard some one climbing up on the dray.

Then there was a lot of splashing and a voice in English exclaimed with an oath :

"We're in luck if it's stores."

"Stores ain't packed like that, you fool. It's hides by the smell, with some wool on top, I expect. Here, you Billy, what name?"

"Baal it me know," Wilton heard a voice say over his head.

"Take the tarpaulin off and see," the man who had first spoken said.

"What do we want with a tarpaulin? Let's find the carrier and see what he's worth."

"He won't have anything worth the taking if he's only got hides on board, unless he'll join us."

"We're too many already for comfort, and we don't want no peachers round the camp."

"Well then, pot him."

"Not much. We don't want to waste our powder. We'll make him run and let the niggers spear him as he goes, same's we served Jim Doolan when he——"

A sharp exclamation from the other man interrupted the speaker, and the greater distinctness with which Wilton heard them speaking told him that the loose corner of the tarpaulin was found, before he heard the man cry out :

"Here's his nest and here's his boots."

Then the voice sounded almost at his ear as he heard the words :

"Come out, or I'll shoot you."

Wilton pressed closer against the sheltering bale and held his breath.

"He ain't in there," one of them said. "He's gone ashore to camp and we'll round him up."

"Come out or I'll shoot," the man cried out again, and Wilton heard the click of the spring as the hammer of the firearm was drawn back.

"That's wasting powder if you——"

A flash of light and the report of a shot stopped the sentence, and a bullet plunged into the wool bale scarce two inches from Wilton's head. The smoke of the powder filled the narrow space and nearly choked him, but he pressed his face against the rough covering of the bale and managed to keep back the cough which would have betrayed him.

"I told you he wasn't in there," he heard one of them say angrily.

"Oh! you're too clever you are. Here, you black thief, come down out of that and look for him ashore," the other growled and to Wilton's great relief, he heard the man slide down the tarpaulin and splash in the water by the side of the dray. Then the voices and the splashing grew fainter and he breathed more freely.

But he dared not move from his cramped position, and remained squeezed between the bales until he ached in every limb. Faintly across the water came the noise of the men, and at every louder sound he feared that a fresh search was to be made at the dray.

Time passed and still there was no token that the men were going to return beyond the continual noise of their voices which came to Wilton as he squeezed between the bales. They were evidently busy over something, and at last the desire to satisfy his curiosity and find out what they were doing overcame his fear. He would creep along the opening under the tarpaulin and look out. If it were too dark for him to see it would be dark enough to prevent his being seen, and even if the moon were shining the men would hardly be able to see the edge of the tarpaulin move, he told himself as he wriggled laboriously and painfully along the narrow space between the bales.

With his hands on the tarpaulin he hesitated. Suppose there were still a man on top of the load? Gently he pushed the edge away until he could get a glimpse of the water. The rain had ceased, and as he looked he saw the shimmer of the moonlight. He pushed himself further forward until his head was almost through the opening, and then strained his ears to catch any sound that might warn him, if his fears were correct, and there was any one beside himself on the dray. Beyond the hum of voices in the distance he heard nothing, and, gaining confidence, he raised the tarpaulin and looked out.

The water all around him was glittering in the moonlight as it rippled in the light breeze which was blowing. He glanced across to where he had seen the black figures chasing his bullocks. Three or four large fires were blazing, and the light from the flames helped the moon in making the immediate surroundings clear to his vision.

Round each fire a number of men were sitting, and their attitudes and constant movements were enough to tell him what they were doing without the sight of his bullocks lying still on the ground. His team had been slaughtered, and the blacks were holding high revel, and were feasting as only blacks know how to feast. He had learned enough of their habits to know that while anything was left to eat the natives would gorge, and that nothing would draw them away from the feast but a hostile attack from another tribe. But the discovery of his loss and the practical ruination it meant to him was too severe a blow for him to realize, at the moment, the chance of escape he had while the blacks were reveling in gluttony. He could only lie still and impotently watch the scene before him and rage at his helplessness either to avenge his loss or remedy his misfortune.

As he lay watching, he saw two men, whose clothes suggested that they were white, passing from one fire to the other and evidently urging the naked blacks to some action. They came to the fire that was nearest to the water, and he could see them pointing to the dray. One of them stooped and picked up a blazing brand from the fire, and held it out to one of the blacks, waving it at the same time towards the dray.

Wilton shuddered as he understood the action. The two men, doubtless the two who had already visited the dray, were urging the blacks to wade out and set fire to it, in order, perhaps, that they might appease their disappointment at not finding the driver. Then the absurdity of the thing came to him. What was there to burn beyond the tarpaulin cover?

It was a little matter but it served to turn the current of his thoughts and

rouse him to something more than the aimless contemplation of his ruined prospects. Supposing that the tarpaulin was the only article which would burn, it would be quite enough to roast him, or, at all events make his hiding place so unbearable that he would have to get out of it, and, in doing so, show himself to the enemy, and meet the doom he had already heard suggested. There was not much to choose between the chance of being half roasted and suffocated or speared as he ran for his life, but of the two he preferred to risk the latter.

He glanced down at the water. It was not so very far to slide down, and if he were once in he might be able to conceal himself in the shadow of the dray until an opportunity offered for him to wade ashore and hide himself among the thickly growing vegetation. He looked towards the fires again.

One stalwart black was standing between him and the nearest blaze, his figure showing conspicuously against the light behind him. In one hand he held a long war spear, and Wilton saw him turn and hold it towards the fire. When he withdrew it the end was blazing, and poisoning it, he sprang forward and hurled it towards the dray.

Forgetful of the possibility of discovery in the face of the new and unexpected danger, Wilton craned his head out to watch the flight of the blazing spear. The aim was straight, and it seemed as though the missile could not fail to strike its target, but happily the thrower had put too much strength into his task, and the spear skimmed over the top of the load, and plunged, hissing, into the water beyond.

A loud shout from the direction of the fires brought Wilton back to his senses, and at first he thought that his eagerness to watch the spear had discovered his whereabouts. He turned his head towards the shore where his enemies were gathered, and his heart sank.

The blacks were running about from one fire to the other, and shouting and yelling in a wild chorus. He felt that he had been seen, and that they were preparing to rush out to him and take him captive, and, without waiting to think, he slid forward and fell into the water. In his fear and dismay he had let himself go without considering the possibilities of his fall making a splash and directing the attention of the blacks to his position. Fortunately for him the manner in which he fell was the only way to avoid splashing, for he glided under the water as silently as an otter would slip from a rock.

As he raised his head above the surface he understood the meaning of the activity round the fire. All the men had seized spears, and were preparing to hurl them, with blazing tips, at the target their fellow had overshot. Even as Wilton looked he saw half a dozen of them leap forward and fling the spark trailing weapons in his direction. A fresh danger threatened him.

When he fell into the water he had the good sense to keep his body below the surface and allow only his head above it. But the water was not deep, and he was compelled to stretch himself out to keep his body under cover. The result was that he was actually more exposed to danger from the spears than if he had remained under the shadow of the wool bales, for should one of them fall near him or upon him, it would be more disastrous than to be baked under the tarpaulin.

The spears were already in the air when he realized his position, and he struggled round to the back of the dray, and, for a moment, breathed more freely. But only for a moment. Two of the spears struck the target, and, plunging into the tarpaulin cover, left the fire brands, with which they had been embellished, hissing and sputtering on the top. Once the tarred cloth caught fire Wilton knew how it would smoke and blaze, and even if he escaped the choking and the heat, he could not hope to escape when the blacks came to gather up the spears which fell wide of the mark.

As the difficulties and perils of his position came one after the other to his mind, he cast about for some loophole of escape. If he could reach the shelter of the thickly growing bush on the shore he might hope for safety, but to stay where he was was merely to court certain death.

He could not see the fires from where he stood under the shelter of the dray, but by the noise he judged the men were still excited, and the constant swish of the spears through the air told him that they were still striving to set the dray on fire. The tarpaulin was already smoking, and in almost a frenzy of uncertainty as to what to do, Wilton looked around.

Gradually the moonlight faded, and glancing upwards he saw a big mass of clouds slowly sailing across the moon. It was his one chance to get across the intervening space of water to the shelter of the bush.

He waited until the cloud entirely obscured the moon and then started for the shore, keeping his body as much below the surface as possible. He was almost within the cover of the shade cast by the dense vegetation when a terrific shout from the direction of the fires sent the blood to his heart. Forgetful of everything save the danger of discovery, and in his fear doing the very thing that was most likely to betray him, he rose to his feet and stood, dripping and helpless, looking towards the place whence the noise came. At the same moment a ruddy light beat round him and lit up the shadows of the bush in front of him. He glanced over his shoulder. The tarpaulin was on fire.

He turned towards the bush in a wild rush for liberty. His foot caught in a snag and he stumbled forward. Recovering himself, he raised his eyes. In front of him, in what, before the tarpaulin blazed, had been a dark shadow, stood the figure of a naked black fellow with his body streaked with the tokens of war and his spear poised.

CHAPTER III.—BATTLE OF THE BLACKS.

WILTON, momentarily paralyzed with fear and terror, stood and looked blankly at the figure in front of him. A renewal of the shouting in the direction of the fires added to his dismay. He took a quick glance round and saw that he was discovered. A score of natives were already in the water wading towards him with brandished spears and wild, discordant yells.

Terrified and unnerved, Wilton plunged forward with a half formed idea in his mind that it would be better to face one rather than twenty, but to his amazement he saw from every bush the figure of a naked warrior start out, until, instead of the solitary black fellow who had first threatened him, a

greater number appeared within the shelter he was seeking than were approaching him from the other side.

A shrill cry echoed through the trees, and as if moved by a single impulse he saw the poised spears, which he had imagined threatened him, fly from the hands of the warriors and soar over his head towards the line of men who were advancing from the direction of the fires. Directly afterwards the warriors leaped from the shelter and advanced into the shallow water, yelling their short, sharp battle cries, and beating their small wooden shields with their nullahs (clubs.)

They dashed past him, and he as promptly sought the shelter they had left. Crouching beside the protecting bulk of a big fallen tree, he peered through the low bushes and watched the progress of events.

The men who had rushed towards him when they caught sight of him, stopped directly when they heard the battle shout of the band secreted among the trees. Others, who had remained on the shore, hastened to join their fellows, and when the flight of spears which followed the battle cry reached the limit of the throw, they fell among a crowd of men, many of whom were brought down.

As the band left its shelter, the men they were attacking also spread out into line, leaping and splashing in the shallow water, while they chanted a weird battle song, and waved their spears over their heads.

Suddenly one man leaped to the front of the line and, poising his spear, hurled it at the foemen. His action was immediately followed by the rest, and a cloud of spears hissed through the air and fell round and among the oncoming band.

But the advance was not checked, and both sides moved towards each other, beating their shields and evidently intending to fight a hand to hand conflict with their clubs, when a fresh and unexpected force took the field.

With a loud, warning shout, the horsemen whom Wilton had seen when he first discovered the raid on his bullocks, rode into the water. The blacks with whom they were traveling broke from their lines and left the space for the horsemen, of whom Wilton counted five, to ride upon the opposing band.

Apparently doubtful as to the meaning of the display, the warriors from the bush stopped, and the horsemen, dropping the reins on their horses' necks, raised their rifles and fired. Five men fell, and the blacks behind the horsemen yelled and shouted. The sound of their voices raised in victorious cries, and the sight of their five comrades writhing in the water, acted upon the remainder of the band in an exactly opposite manner to what the appearance of the horsemen had done. With harsh yells they sprang forward, surrounding the horsemen and engaging the men of their own color at the same time.

There was a confused *melée* of figures and a terrible din of shouting and yelling. Wilton saw one man fall from his saddle, and the horse, freed from restraint, plunged and kicked its way from amidst the crowd that surged and swayed in the fight. It made directly for the dark shadow of the bush where Wilton was hiding, and he, realizing the chance it offered him, was wading out to meet it almost before he understood what he was doing.

The horse turned towards the fires, and he hastened after it, forgetting all else in his haste and anxiety to secure it. As it emerged on to the hard ground, he was beside it, and catching the loose bridle that hung from its head, he sprang upon its back and urged it forward into a headlong gallop, past the fires where the remains of his team still lay, away from the uproar and noise of the fight into the darkness beyond, where he knew the track was that would lead him nearer civilization and safety.

How long he rode he did not know, for the rush of events and the vicissitudes of the past few hours had robbed his mind of everything save the one paramount anxiety for escape. Gradually the sounds of the conflict became fainter and fainter, until at last he lost them in the noise of his horse's hoofs. The moment he ceased to hear them a fresh fear came to him. What if the fight were over, and the remainder of the horsemen were riding after him? For in the whirl of excitement and fear he did not stop to think that when he got away from the scene everybody else was far too much engaged in the struggle to notice him, or to take heed whether the retiring horseman, supposing they had observed him, were one of themselves or one of the black fellows who had made the attack.

He reined in his horse and turned his head in the direction whence he had come. The air was still and quiet, and no sound came to him to suggest that the conflict was still in progress; but whether it was because he had ridden too far or because the battle was over, he was not able to decide. The mere fact, however, that he had checked his wild gallop and exerted himself to listen to something else than the promptings which had urged him forward in his fight, roused him sufficiently from the control of his fear to enable him to note his condition and consider his best course of action.

He was bootless and hatless, and his clothes still clung to him in their chill dampness. Worse than that, he was hungry, and with the discovery that his adventures had not robbed his appetite of its existence, came the memory that he was without the means of satisfying it. He felt in the leather pouch attached to his belt, in which he carried his pipe and tobacco, and found a sodden piece of the latter, but the pipe he had left in the dray. And it was in the dray that there was food as well, he thought rapidly, as his mind, freed from the confusion and strain of terror, began to clear and regard matters in a quiet, rational way.

After passing the flat, had he got over it safely, he would have been five days, he anticipated, before he reached the first station, presuming that the road was not blocked by flooded creeks or impassable bogs now that the rain had come. Mounted on a good horse he might cover the distance in two days under ordinary circumstances, but his experience on the flat warned him that the country before him was heavily flooded, so that it might be weeks before he would be able to get through. And how was he to exist under those conditions? Two days without, not only food, but a smoke or a fire, was bad enough; a week would be fatal. And there was only one way to avoid it, and that was to go back and see whether the enemy had departed, and whether there was anything left of his dray.

The first tinge of dawning gray was in the sky when at length Wilton

decided upon running the risk which he felt might result from his return to the scene he had been so anxious to get away from a few hours earlier.

"I should have been all right in the scrub. The blacks were too much occupied in their own business to bother about me, and as for the white fellows, I reckon they had enough to do with those yelling mobs before the end of it," he reflected; but he was careful to get into the bush and off the open track as the daylight increased.

As he continued his return journey without hearing or seeing anything of the contending bands, his courage rose, and he felt that, after all, it had been quite easy to escape from what at the time seemed an overwhelming danger. As he approached the scene of the fight, he dismounted from his horse, and, leading it until he found a suitable spot, he hitched the bridle to a tree and proceeded, cautiously, on foot.

When he left the track he had gone well into the bush, guiding himself entirely by what he considered the direction of the flat. As it happened, he had gone more to the side than he believed, and when he had reached the stretch of water that covered the flat, he was half way past it. A chance opening between the trees revealed it to him, and as he crept to the edge of the water, keeping well under cover all the time, he found that he was immediately opposite the dray on the other side to that where he had struggled ashore.

Peering over the bushes towards the place where the fires had blazed the night before, he saw that smoke was still rising gently; but he could not note any signs of life. Looking over the water he saw, here and there, dark spots, while over at the place where the fight had raged when he left, he could make out more dark spots and the slender shafts of spears showing above the water like sloping reeds.

But there was no sound and no sight of life to be seen anywhere. Moving with the utmost caution, he crept around the edge of the water until he was near enough the still smoldering fires to distinctly see what was around them.

The remains of his bullocks first caught his eye, as they lay between the fires and the water. Beyond them, away towards the bush, lay the body of a horse, with spears sticking out all over it until it seemed to be a mammoth porcupine. The fires were reduced to smoldering embers, and Wilton, emboldened at the silence that was in the air, drew nearer. As he did so he noticed that beyond the horse the body of a man lay on the ground, and a man dressed in European clothes.

He glanced quickly round. Near to where he was standing, one of the black spots appeared on the top of the water, and he was close enough to know that it was the back of a dead black fellow which just rose above the surface of the water. Then all the others were dead black fellows, too, and here was one dead white fellow as well.

One he had seen fall himself, and the one before him accounted for two out of the five. He walked over to the horse, and as he went he noticed the prints of the horses' hoofs in the soft earth. They were going both to and from the water; but the former were smooth impressions, while the latter

were deep scars, as though the animals that made them had been madly charging. The dead horse had fallen in its stride, and there was the impression where its rider had struck the ground, and also the marks where he had slipped as he tried to clamber on to his feet before the spear, which had struck him in the back and pierced him so as to stick out a couple of feet from his chest, had been hurled at him.

"My side won after all," Wilton thought, as he stooped over the body of his countryman. There was a pistol in the belt and a bag of ammunition, while on the ground between him and his horse lay the bushranger's rifle. Wilton hastily gathered them, and carried them into the bush, where he deposited them and returned to the shore opposite the dray. From what he saw, he reasoned that the fight had gone against the white men and their allies, and that they had fled with the victors in full cry after them. But both parties would know of the amount of food that lay round the fires, and it was quite impossible for a black fellow to continue a chase very long while there was such an opportunity to gorge. So he anticipated that it would not be long before some of them returned, and in the meantime he determined to get what he could.

A closer inspection of the dray revealed the fact that, although the covering of tarpaulin had been reduced to ashes, and the top of the wool bales scorched, the load was practically uninjured. As Wilton waded up to it, and prepared to climb into the narrow crevice where he had left his tucker bag, his foot struck against something solid in the mud. He reached down and found one of his boots, and a little way off he came across the other. The pain that he had endured in his barefoot walk through the bush made the find the more appreciable, and when he clambered up on the dray, his first act was to put the saturated articles on his bruised and cut feet. Then he gathered his blankets and tucker bag, and having put all the provisions he had into the latter, he waded ashore with the lot. He returned to where he had deposited the firearms and ammunition, and taking them up, pushed on to where he had left his horse.

He was hungry and fatigued when he arrived there, but fearing that the blacks might return to the neighborhood at any moment, he strapped his "swag" on to the saddle bow, and with his rifle slung across his shoulders, and the loaded pistol in his belt, he started off again from the scene of his disaster.

CHAPTER IV.—BARRIERS ON THE ROAD.

THE sun was high in the heavens before he would allow himself to draw rein. By that time he had ridden some miles away from the flooded flat, and had come to a rocky creek down which the water was rushing with a force and volume that utterly precluded any idea of fording it. He dismounted, and, after a brief search, found a well sheltered nook high above the reach of floods, even if the creek were twice as full, and near which was plenty of feed for the horse. He hastily took off the saddle and swag, and having hobbled the animal so that it should not stray, he set to work to make a fire

and, while his billy boiled, to arrange as comfortable a camp as he could. After he had enjoyed, with all the avidity of semi starvation, a heavy meal from the contents of his tucker bag, he stretched himself out on his blankets and fell into a deep and heavy sleep.

When he awakened he fancied it was just after sunset, and he arose and went to his fire to fan the embers into a flame. He was surprised to find that it was not only out, but cold, and he hastened to start another so as not to be left in the darkness without the companionship of a fire. Instead, however, of the dusk growing darker it became lighter, and Wilton realized that he had slept right on from the previous afternoon. The fire that was to have kept him company during the night now served to prepare his morning meal, and when that was finished he started to look for his horse. It had not strayed very far, and soon after the sun was up he had it saddled and was riding along the creek looking for a place where he might safely get across. Lower down the stream widened, and, putting his horse into it, he managed to reach the other side, though the current was so strong as nearly to carry his horse off its legs in the middle of the ford.

Directly they arrived at the other side the horse, of its own initiative, turned up stream and trotted off as if it were taking a well known road. Without paying any particular attention to the fact, Wilton gave it a free rein as he filled his pipe. He was lighting it when the horse turned in its course and walked rapidly up a steep rise, over which big boulders were scattered. Behind one of them it again turned and stopped, and Wilton found that he was in front of a narrow opening in the rock.

The meaning of the horse's action, and the significance of the opening, flashed into his mind. The horse had taken its own road home, and had brought him to the bushrangers' lair.

His first impulse was to ride away as fast as he could, but on second thoughts he altered his intention. He was armed, and at least two of the gang were killed, while the others had ridden away in an opposite direction after the fight, even if they had not also been slain. Besides, he might obtain some valuable information by a brief exploration of the cave.

Jumping from the saddle, he fastened the bridle where he could easily seize it if he had to run. Then, with his rifle in his hands and his pistol loosened in his belt, he stepped into the cavern.

He entered a medium sized chamber, the floor of which was smooth and sandy. In one corner several rifles stood against the wall, with a pile of saddlery and harness beside them. Some blankets lay in a heap in another part, while such odds and ends of bush life as one or two axes, billy cans, and tin pannikins were scattered about.

"It's only a temporary camp after all," he muttered to himself, as he wandered round the place. He pulled the blankets away from where they rested, and in doing so exposed the top of a small keg just showing above the sand.

"If it's powder I'll waste it, and then hurry on to pass the word to the police. It may be news to them, for I never heard of a gang up this road before."

It was powder, and near that one keg Wilton discovered some more, all of which he carried outside the cave and hid among the boulders on the hill. Then he remounted his horse and rode away back to the ford where he had crossed the creek, carefully noting the situation of the cave as he went. As soon as he reached the ford he struck out for the track, and, finding it, hurried along towards the nearest station.

He successfully crossed the first two streams he met on his route. The track, after he had crossed the second creek, turned towards the direction of the general slope of the country, and as Wilton rode along he found more and more evidences of the flooded state of the land ahead, until he could not help being convinced that he would not be able to travel very much farther but would have to camp beside some impassable stream until the waters had had sufficient time to run off.

It was not long before he arrived at such a creek, and on its banks he was obliged to bide as patiently as he could for five days.

By the sixth the crossing was passable though not entirely safe, but Wilton was too keen on reaching some place from which he could obtain the necessary help to enable him to return and rescue his dray from its precarious position, and also from whence he could despatch information to the police authorities as to his discovery of the hiding place of a bushranging gang.

He struck camp, and with nothing more serious than a good wetting he managed to get across the stream and pressed forward on his journey.

But that was not, unfortunately the only creek between him and settlement, and he had not ridden very many miles before he was again compelled to halt on the bank of a fiercely rushing stream. Striking out for a short cut he had come upon the creek at a place where it swerved round a projecting point, the current boiling and eddying in a hundred swirls. Beyond the point the stream widened, and the high bank on which he stood sloped down, while on the opposite side the bank was high all along. He rode down slowly to the lower point to see whether there was not some means by which he could get over, but it only needed a brief inspection to show him that the feat was quite impossible in the face of the awkward bank on the other side. Had it shelved down the same as that on which he stood, he would have swum his horse over, but it would have been suicidal to attempt such a thing with a precipitous bluff affording no foothold as a landing place.

He continued to ride slowly along the bank, looking for a likely spot where his horse would have a chance of emerging if it managed to get through the current. A mile or so further along the stream again widened, and the banks on either side sloped down until they were little above the surface of the water. He was debating whether to risk it or not, and glanced back at the higher point whence he had come and where he had noticed an excellent site for a camp. He just caught sight of two men, both armed with rifles, slipping behind the trees.

Without more ado he rode his horse straight for the stream. The animal shied and swerved aside at the bubbling water, but he dug his heels into its sides and forced it into the flood. He heard a loud cry from the top of the bank where he had seen the two men, and a rifle shot echoed through the

gullies. At the same moment he felt his horse lose its foothold, and slipping his feet from the stirrups, he threw himself out of the saddle just as the horse stumbled forward. Still holding the bridle he tried to keep the horse's head from turning down stream, while both battled with the current and swam for their lives. In spite of their efforts they were swept along, and Wilton realized that the only chance that was left for them ever to reach the shore again was by keeping themselves afloat and trusting to their being carried near enough to get a foothold, or into water sufficiently slack to permit them to make some progress.

Weighted as he was with the rifle strapped across his shoulders he already felt exhausted, and the horse was snorting with fear and fatigue when the stream narrowed and the current whirled them along like straws. He tried to look toward the banks past which they were rushing, but the eddies were so strong that he was spun round before he could do more than get a confused blur of high bluffs on every side. He felt a tug at the bridle, and knew that it had been jerked from his grasp. The horse was out of sight; he heard an ugly roaring in his ears; there was a swift vision of blue sky and green leaves and then a rude blow at the back of his head. Helpless, exhausted, and nerveless, he ceased his fight and sank into dark and senseless oblivion.

When Wilton recovered his senses he was lying on the ground with a group of men gathered round him.

"Where am I?" he asked when he had recovered sufficiently to speak.

"You're under arrest," one of the men replied.

"Then you are police?" Wilton asked in a gleeful tone.

"Not all of us, but quite enough so for you," the man who had spoken before replied.

"Better arrest him properly now that he can understand," one of the group remarked.

"That'll do any time," another said. "We've got to learn a lot first, and there may be trouble with 'over the creek there' if we don't start our business before they come into it."

There was a murmur of assent from the other men, and Wilton, anxious to understand all that was going on, made as if to sit up. Two or three of the men at once forced him down again and proceeded to tie his arms and legs. Then, when he was securely fastened, they propped him up against a tree in a sitting position.

"I'm not going to run away," he said, after vainly protesting against the indignity.

"No more than you ran from the police over the creek?" one of the men said with a laugh.

"I never ran from the police. They are the very people I want. I am on my way now to warn them," Wilton exclaimed.

"On a stolen horse and under arms; what next?" rejoined the other.

"He's too old a bird for you, Johnson. Let me have a yarn with him."

The speaker was one of the men who had not, up to that moment, taken any part in the conversation, but had stood a silent spectator of all that was going on. Wilton, looking towards him, saw a slimly built, wiry man, with

iron gray hair, and, what was a noticeable peculiarity in the bush, a clean shaven face. He approached Wilton, who noted the closely set, thin lips and the look of fixed determination in the steely gray eyes.

"Now, my lad, if you want to save trouble, out with it, smart. Where are the rest of you?" he said, standing beside Wilton and looking down at him.

There was a domineering tone in the voice which grated upon Wilton's temper.

"You'd better say who you mean," he answered.

"Keep your tongue civil or you'll get more than you ask for," the other said with a frown as he stirred Wilton with his foot. "We don't waste time over men of your stamp. There's a handy tree and we've plenty of rope, so just answer my questions properly? Where are the rest of you?"

"Who are you?" Wilton exclaimed angrily.

"I'm William Giles of Billah Station and a justice of the peace, as you very well know, so no more of that nonsense."

"Never heard of you," Wilton answered.

"I suppose not, and that explains how you are found with a horse that was stolen from my paddocks only a few weeks back."

"I can tell you all about that," Wilton exclaimed. "Now I know who you are——"

The men standing round laughed loudly.

"Now he knows who you are he does not mind talking to you, Giles; only don't be too familiar," one of them said banteringly.

The frown on Giles' face grew sterner.

"I'm not going to waste all the day!" he exclaimed angrily. "Where are the rest of you?"

"Well, there is only my horse besides me, or rather your horse, as you say he is yours," Wilton began, when the renewed laughter of the group interrupted him.

CHAPTER V.—THE SQUATTERS TURN OUT.

GILES turned quickly towards them.

"Is that how to treat one of Doolan's murderers?" he cried savagely.

The laughter ceased at once, and one or two of the men muttered something which Wilton could not catch.

"We don't know that he is, yet," the man whom Giles had addressed as Johnson said.

"And we're not likely to, either, while you let him make fools of the lot of us," Giles retorted. "If you've forgotten our murdered neighbor, I have not."

"Let him tell his story in his own way," Johnson said.

"And waste time in listening to a pack of lies and enable the rest of the crew to get well away," Giles replied. "Then before any of the others could speak he turned again to Wilton. "See here," he continued, "we've had enough of this. If you cannot remember we will assist your memory."

He picked up a length of strong rope which lay on the ground near Wilton, and fastening one end to a stone, threw it over a branch of the tree against which Wilton was propped. As the stone fell, dragging the rope with it, he caught it and untied the knot, retying it in the form of a noose.

"Now then, you know what that's for; and if you don't tell us where all the rest of the crew are hiding, and how many you are, and all about the murder of Doolan, up you go," he said.

"I cannot tell you what I do not know," Wilton replied. "All I know is——"

"You shall have five minutes in which to remember," Giles interrupted.

"Give him a show," another of the group exclaimed.

"I am a carrier, and my name is Wilton," he went on. "I was on my way from Caryl Downs with wool and hides when I got bogged in the flat beyond Stoney Creek. A mob of blacks came up and speared my bullocks. They had white men with them and I was escaping when another mob of blacks appeared and began to fight the first lot. Then the white men joined in and one was knocked off his horse. I caught the beast and rode away for my life, but as I had no food, and all the creeks were in flood, I went back to see if I could get at my tucker in the dray. I found that every one had cleared except the fellows who were killed, among whom was a white man, and it was from him I took the firearms. When I had taken my tucker and blankets I started off for Meleelee Station, as the nearest place where I could get help and send word to the police. On my way I was stuck up by the creeks which were running bankers, but the horse took me to a cave where I found a lot of arms and powder. That is what I wanted to tell the police. I can tell you where it is. You go——"

"Two minutes gone," Giles interrupted. "Three minutes more to tell the truth or swing."

"This *is* the truth," Wilton cried.

"What do you say, boys?" Giles turned to the assembled men.

"Lies!" some one exclaimed.

"I should rather think so," Giles added.

"I tell you it is the truth. Go and see for yourselves," Wilton retorted.

"Now listen to me," Giles went on, speaking seriously and with his brows drawn down in an ugly frown. "This is no game we're playing. You're one of the gang that murdered Doolan of Meleelee, because we found you with arms that we know, by the marks on them, were stolen from his station, and with a horse that was stolen from my paddocks about the same time. We give you this chance for your life. Say where the gang are hiding, and we will let the authorities decide whether you are to swing or not. Refuse, and we run you up as a warning to let others see that we squatters are not going to be left to the mercy of every escaped convict whom the government is too lazy to catch."

"That's the talk!" a man exclaimed.

"Go on; out with it," Johnson said. "We mean business."

"You said you were police," Wilton cried.

"We know what we said. The government can only spare two police,

and they are the other side of the creek, so we're acting for ourselves over here. Now then, hurry up," Giles answered.

"I know nothing more than I have told you," Wilton exclaimed. "I'll guide you to the cave and to the flat, and then you can see for yourselves. If you don't find what I tell you——"

"None of that. You'll tell us what we want to know or swing," Giles interrupted.

"Perhaps this will help," another of the men said as he stepped forward, and, passing the noose over Wilton's head, drew it closely round his neck.

"Hang on to the slack a bit," he cried, and Johnson seizing it, pulled it until the noose jerked Wilton's head forward.

"I've told you the truth!" he shouted; "I'm not a bushranger!"

Another jerk of the rope was the only answer he received, but the men standing round glared at him savagely.

"Don't! don't!" he yelled, as the cord tightening round his throat nearly choked him.

"Give him another taste. Remember Doolan!" Giles cried, and a hoarse and angry murmur came from the men. Johnson jerked the rope again, and Giles, reaching up, caught hold of it, too, and pulled so hard that Wilton was lifted for the moment off his feet. As the weight of his body came on to the rope the noose drew so tight that it cut into his neck and sent the blood to his head. His eyes started nearly out of their sockets and his tongue lolled out of his mouth, which he opened with the intention of crying for mercy, but the cord was too tight, and only a gurgling sound came. He felt as if his head were bursting and thought his last moment had come.

But his tormenters had no intention of letting him die so quickly. They relaxed their hold of the cord, and he came to the ground again, and lay as he fell. Giles loosened the noose enough for him to breath and then stood over him until he recovered.

As he regained consciousness he also realized the extreme danger he was in, for without knowing the exact particulars of the case, he had gathered enough from what he had heard to know that the men were a band of squatters out to punish malefactors that the government either could, or would, not trouble about.

Although it was not known to Wilton, a band of desperadoes had been inflicting disaster in all parts of the district through which he was traveling. The leader was well known by repute, and was said by all who had had the misfortune to come within his clutches to be a particularly cold blooded scoundrel, with a long black beard and a big head of hair of the same color. That he was able as well as wicked was proved by the fact that neither he nor any of his band had as yet been caught, though the government had sent as many as two troopers to carry out the task of dispersing the gang and arresting or shooting the leader. Again and again the squatters had turned out to be avenged upon the marauders, but always to return baffled and dejected. The most arduous and indefatigable organizer of these expeditions was William Giles, and his zeal in the cause had won from the government the recognition of a local magistracy.

The most recent escapade of the gang under the leadership of Captain Midnight, as he was termed in deference to the color of his hair and beard, had been more than usually daring and irritating to the squatters. They had just returned after a prolonged search for the desperadoes when the news was passed round that fresh outrages had occurred; one consisting of the robbery of a very fine black horse which the squatter leader Giles had ridden in the last expedition, and the other the murder of the owner of Meleelee Station, the next estate to that which Giles owned.

The murder of Doolan had been more than usually barbarous. The few men he employed were away from the head station at the time, and on their return they found the unfortunate squatter lying in front of his own door, riddled with spears. At first the men regarded the outrage as due to blacks, but they were undeceived by a handkerchief which was tied to one of the spears and on which was rudely written in the blood of the murdered man, "Account Settled.—Midnight."

The site of the murder was named as the meeting place whence the avenging band would start on the track of the common foe, and a greater number assembled than had been together on the previous and fruitless occasion. More than that, two troopers who were traveling in the district heard an account of the tragedy and joined the expedition, which started away with the intrepid Giles at the head, vowing to give a short shrift to any of the bushrangers who might have the misfortune to fall into captivity.

For the purpose of meting out summary justice they carried several coils of strong rope with them; and, in order to follow the murderers right up to their lair, wherever that might be, they also provided themselves with enough provisions to last a month.

Before they had been many days out the rain set in. The creeks, flowing down from the high table land, came down "bankers" long before there was sufficient local rain to flood them, and the fact filled the avengers' hearts with glee. They knew that higher up there was a perfect network of creeks and gullies which would seriously hamper, in their flooded state, the escaping gang. It was evident that blacks were with the outlaws, for, as the squatters advanced, they found evidences of that in many a token plain enough to their bush trained eyes. So they pressed onward, getting over and through creeks which, under ordinary circumstances, they would have left alone, but which, aided by their zeal and the ropes they carried, were safely forded.

But that which they anticipated would prove an impassable obstacle in the path of their retreating foe was also an obstruction in theirs, and at last they arrived at the bank of a creek which was at once seen to be impassable. Chafing at the enforced delay, they wandered up and down the bank in the hopes of finding some place where they could get across. The search was rewarded, for the scouts who went farthest afield came back with the news that they had discovered a narrow gorge through which the stream rushed, and over which men could pass with the aid of a rope. The most daring of the band, headed by the intrepid Giles, hastened off to examine the place. If once the rope were stretched they could get across, they averred, although to get the horses over was out of the question. The two troopers who were with

the party expressed doubts as to the chance of any one breasting such a current ; but the squatters were mostly young men, and they laughed to scorn the caution of the police. Nor did they stop at laughing, but said so many biting things about the quality of the troopers' strength, skill, and courage, that the younger of the two blazed up in a rage, and said he would prove them wrong by crossing the stream himself.

The attempt was postponed until the morning, and the evening was spent in debating the best means of carrying out the wild scheme. It was decided that the best course would be for the trooper to take the water as far up the stream as the length of rope would permit, and with two inflated empty water bags to support him, strike out for the other shore in a slanting course, going with the stream as much as possible. One end of the line was to be made fast to a tree and its entire length passed along, in a necessarily slow and tedious fashion, on the outside of the trees that grew on the bank, up to the place where he was to enter the stream.

At daybreak the band repaired to the scene of the proposed crossing, and for an hour or so all were busy helping, advising, and looking on. When at length everything was in readiness, the trooper, with the slack end of the line made fast to his temporary buoys, slid into the water and struck out vigorously for the other side. The current carried him along at a rate that seemed to make it impossible for him to get across before the limit of the line was exhausted ; but he was a powerful swimmer, and, moreover, had his blood up, and the watchers could not restrain a cheer when they saw him clutch and hold an overhauling tree on the other side of the narrow, boiling creek.

The cheer was rudely checked by the arrival of the man who had been left in charge of the horses at the camp. He galloped up furiously, and breathlessly gave the information that nearly opposite the camp an armed horseman had appeared on the other bank. The band tried to signal to their comrade the intelligence, and, as soon as he had made the line fast, it was pulled taut and his fellow trooper expressed his intention of going next.

With his own and his comrade's weapons and ammunition strapped across his shoulders he started, his anxiety to get over and have the first brush with the outlaws overcoming his prudence. He reached the middle of the stream, the line straining at the pressure put upon it. Suddenly he was seen to shoot rapidly down the current, and a cry of dismay went up from the impatient watchers. The knot had slipped on their side and their frail bridge was gone.

The trooper clung desperately to the rope, and managed to keep afloat until the current carried him to the bank where his comrade stood. Then the squatters watched him as he emerged, and realized that they were cut off from participating in the fray. They saw him pointing away to where the armed horseman had been reported to have been seen, and then the two vanished in the bush.

Giles urged an immediate return to the camp for more rope, and as he and his companions hastened along, they saw the horseman take the stream. They ran along the bank watching him in his struggles, and more than one

rifle covered him as he was spun round and round in the current. They saw him drift into the extended limbs of a fallen tree, which lay in the creek, and get wedged in the fork of one long, thin branch. It was only the work of a few minutes for one of them to hasten with a line, and, tying it round the unconscious Wilton, enable the rest to draw him to the shore. Then they waited for him to recover his senses, deciding in a brief council of war held in the meantime to extort from him the secret of the gang's hiding place before they hanged him on the nearest tree.

CHAPTER VI.—ON THE TRACK.

THE troopers on the other side of the stream also saw Wilton plunge into the water, but before he did so one of them recognized him.

"It's Wilton, the carrier," he exclaimed to his companion. "He's escaped from the gang and wants to give us the tip, I'm sure."

"They'll hang him on the other side if they catch him, whoever he is," his comrade replied. "They're as hungry for killing as ever I saw men."

"Then we'll go back and stop it. That Giles is a fool at work like this. He always spoils a capture."

They climbed along the bank until they saw Wilton dragged from the water, and, later, saw the rope thrown over the branch and the noose placed round his neck. They shouted, but to no purpose; and at last, as they saw him swung off his feet, the younger of the two ran down to the water's edge and plunged into the current, with the intention of swimming over and saving Wilton from the wrath of his captors. He was still battling with the flood when Giles let go the rope and allowed Wilton to fall to the ground.

With the noose loosened, he gasped for breath and tried to plead for mercy.

"Tell the truth, you fool, or up you go! and this time not to come down," Giles cried, and his companions, their worst passions roused now that a victim was in their power, crowded round him with horrible threats. One shouted out to burn him; another to flog him; and yet another to bury him in an ant hill, until Wilton lost all sense in a wild frenzy of terror that came upon him.

"Up with him! up with him!" the men yelled, and a dozen hands seized the end of the rope and pulled the unfortunate creature off the ground.

"Stop! It's murder!" cried a voice behind them, and they turned as one man and faced the trooper, who dripping and breathless staggered towards them from the creek. They laughed harshly as they pulled the harder, and, crowding together, cheered as their victim struggled in the air while the trooper hopelessly threw himself against their united ranks.

"Let him down. He's innocent. It's Wilton, the carrier," the trooper cried as he strove to fight his way through the crowd to where Giles and others hung on to the rope. But the squatters were too much incensed to listen to any one who talked about liberating the victim whose body was writhing in the air in all the contortions slow strangulation can produce.

The men against whom the trooper threw himself easily repulsed him, and

he let his tongue run loose as an aid to his efforts at driving back the crowd. Two or three of those who were nearest to him turned upon him, and roughly seizing him, sent him staggering back until he tripped and fell. And to that fall, Wilton owed his rescue, for the trooper had stumbled over a rifle that one of his squatters had thrown on the ground in his haste to lend a hand at hauling up the unfortunate carrier.

The trooper picked it up, and aiming in that haphazard manner, which is often the most effective, pulled the trigger. He had acted so quickly, and the men were so engrossed in their work that they were totally unprepared for the sound of a rifle shot so close to them. They started in a momentary panic, each one turning to where he had left his rifle, under the idea that the bushrangers were upon them. The bullet struck the rope as it passed over the branch, and the body of Wilton dropped down upon those immediately beneath him. Had he fallen clear to the ground, his career would have terminated at once, but his fall was broken and his life practically saved by those who a moment before had been trying to take it. His heels struck Giles on the forehead, tearing a ugly wound and stunning him. Two others also shared the force of Wilton's descent, and the four lay in a confused heap together, while the remainder, uncertain as to whether the branch of the tree had broken or the bushrangers were upon them, scattered for their weapons.

With the now empty rifle in his hands the trooper sprang forward, and pulling the noose loose from Wilton's throat, stood over the prostrate men. His movements made the squatters recover their wits and understand the meaning of what had just occurred. They realized that their victim had been snatched out of their hands at the very moment of victory, and their rage broke out anew. With angry shouts they turned upon the trooper. He, recognizing the danger of his position, brought his rifle to cover the man nearest him.

"Stand back, or I'll shoot!" he cried, and the squatters, surly and menacing, drew back.

"This man came to put us on the track of the gang. He's Wilton, the carrier. I know him well. And you've nearly killed him," the trooper said excitedly.

"He said that, but we didn't believe him," one of the men, whose head was cooler, than the others, answered.

"That's so," Johnson exclaimed. "It was Giles that said the chap was lying."

The brief conversation was sufficient to turn the anger of the band, and as the trooper stooped over Wilton, others lifted up the three men who had been injured by his fall and did what they could to restore them.

Giles had received the severest hurt, his companions in distress recovering in a few minutes. But he still lay senseless. They bound up the wound on his forehead, but in such a necessarily clumsy manner that when it ultimately healed a scar was left which branded and disfigured him for the rest of his life. His comrades carried him back to the camp and laid him on a roughly improvised couch, and then waited patiently for him to show some signs of returning vitality. Wilton was also carried to the same place and

similarly treated, for the men were not versed in any of the methods by which the recovery of both of the injured could have been accelerated. A strong constitution was the remedy for all ills that could befall a man in those days, and if any one were sufficiently unlucky to meet with a hurt when his constitution was not strong enough to fight and overcome it, a hole would be dug at the foot of a tree, the dead man's initials rudely carved on the bark, and the tide of settlement flow on, as if it had never been interrupted.

So it was that the men stood or sat around the two patients, smoking and discussing what chance either had of "bucking up." Not because they lacked sympathy, nor because they were indifferent to the lives of their fellow men, but because their constant association with danger in the rough and tumble of their everyday lives robbed the situation of its solemnity.

Wilton was the first to recover, and, as he opened his eyes and glanced at the men standing near him, he struggled to recall the events which had preceded the dark shadow that had come across his memory. The trooper went over to him.

"Hullo, Wilton, how are you feeling?" he asked.

Wilton looked at him questioningly.

"You know me, don't you? Farrell, the trooper, who travelled with you."

"Yes, I know. But how did I get here?" Wilton asked weakly.

"Oh, that's all right. Tell me all you know about the gang that stuck you up."

Wilton started up. "I remember!" he exclaimed. "They were going to hang me."

"Well, they didn't, so there's nothing to get excited about," Farrell said.

Remembering so much, Wilton discovered that his neck was swollen and sore, and that his throat pained him so much that he could only speak with an effort.

"Tell me all," he said.

Farrell gave him a brief outline of what had transpired.

"Directly I knew who you were I fired to attract your attention, but you rode slap into the stream and came as near drowning as any man could without finishing the business. Then the men on this side collared you, and insisting that you were one of the gang, were going to hang you when I managed to get across the creek and tell them who you were."

Giles was more difficult to soothe when he recovered consciousness. His personal injuries were bad enough, but the escape of Wilton seemed to be the greatest evil in his eyes. He raved and raged at every one, swearing that Farrell was in league with the outlaws, and that Wilton was one of them, and finally announced his intention of returning to his home at once and having no more to do with any attempt the squatters might make to put down the bushrangers.

The creek was rapidly falling, and by sunset the other trooper got across and joined in the heated discussion which was raging around the camp fire, for under the altered bearing of Giles, discord had come into the band, and

some were for returning to their homes, while others clamored for an immediate advance.

"Well, we go on anyhow, whether we go alone or with any of you," Farrell said angrily. "If you had listened to Wilton, and acted like sensible men, we could have been miles on the track of the gang by this time."

"I'm with you," Wilton said.

"You're right, trooper," Johnson remarked. "We blundered there and now it's only fair to follow your lead."

There was a general murmur of assent when some one turned to Giles and asked what he intended to do.

"Mind my own business and be done with the lot of you," he replied; and when the morning came and the men made ready for the advance, no one was very much surprised to find that Giles had started, presumably for home, taking with him his own horse as well as that which Wilton had brought down.

"We're well rid of him; he always upsets the business somehow," Farrell said to Wilton. "He's a man I don't trust."

The fact that Giles had taken Wilton's horse did not delay the starting of the party as there were several spare animals; and an hour or so after sunrise, they were riding along the banks of the creek towards a ford which was situated farther up. The rapid rate at which the waters were running off enabled them to cross with little difficulty, and when they halted for the mid-day meal, there were only a few miles between them and the cave that Wilton had found, and which was to be the first place visited.

They pushed on as rapidly as possible and were soon on the track of Wilton's horse, the imprints of whose hoofs were clearly marked in the soft ground over which he had ridden. They had followed them for a mile or so when a sharp exclamation from the man in front caused every one to ride up to where he sat on his horse pointing to the ground.

The hoof prints of two other horses had suddenly appeared beside those that Wilton's horse had made, but they were turned in the opposite direction and were evidently going to and not from the cave.

Farrell jumped from his horse and examined them closely.

"They're fresh made," he exclaimed as he stood up. "Forward, lads, and we'll have them before sunset."

The enthusiasm of the band was again aroused, and they galloped forward with their rifles slung ready for use and their ammunition bags handy. No-body spoke, but every one kept a keen lookout on all sides as they followed Farrell, who had now taken the lead, at a hand gallop.

At the ford where the horse had turned aside to go to the cave, Farrell reined in his mount and pointed to the ground. The rest of the men crowded round him and looked. The double tracks were both going to and coming from the cave.

"They cross the creek," Johnson exclaimed.

"Then we'll push on after them," Farrell cried.

But opinion was divided, and some of the men were for visiting the cave first, in case the track of the horses was only a blind.

"We can follow it till we come to the horses if that is so, and with the horses in our possession we can soon run down the men," Farrell maintained.

Further argument was cut short by the troopers and Johnson riding over the ford, and even those who had urged that the cave should be visited first, followed.

They had not gone very far on the other side when Wilton pointed out whereabouts the cave was situated, and they stopped a moment to look, when a column of white smoke shot up, and a dull report echoed among the boulders.

The men looked at one another in amazement. There could be no doubt about the significance of what they had seen. A mine had been prepared for them in the cave, and had they visited it instead of crossing the ford, they might all have been blown to atoms.

"There's only one man with enough of the devil in him to lay a trap like that," Farrell said. "Captain Midnight's not far away, I'll be bound."

"Then here goes after him!" one of the men replied, and the horses were wheeled round and set again to gallop along the track.

CHAPTER VII.—MIDNIGHT DOUBLES.

THEY would have arrived at the flat where Wilton had left his dray, and where the fight between the natives had occurred, by sunset, had it not been for an accident to one of the party which compelled them to delay until all hopes of reaching the flat before dark were destroyed.

The track sloped down at a place where the storm water had poured along it, loosening the stones from the soil. As the advance of the band rode over it, the stones were still more disturbed, with the result that one of the horses stumbled badly and threw its rider heavily over its head. He was shaken severely, but urged that the remainder should press on, saying that he would follow at his leisure.

With the explosion at the cave still fresh in their minds, the others, however, would not hear of such an arrangement.

"We're after the greatest scoundrel, but the cleverest bushranger of the lot," Johnson said, "and our only chance is to keep well together till we get some idea of how many he has with him. He may have a tribe of blacks and where shall we be then if we are all scattered?"

They decided to wait until their comrade was ready to travel again, and it was soon evident that the wait would extend until the following morning. A convenient site for a camp was chosen off the track, and the party divided into watches for the night. A fire was made in a sheltered spot, and the men gathered round it for the evening meal. The sun was just going below the horizon and the bush was filled with the half light that is so deceptive. The leaders were arranging who should be the first to go on watch, when, with a loud mocking shout, a horseman dashed out of the bush almost beside them, and, riding furiously through the crowd, vanished into the shadows of the bush beyond.

There was just time to notice the black horse and that the rider was a thick set, broad shouldered man with a black beard and long black hair, before both horse and rider were out of sight.

"Midnight!" every one exclaimed, as, with rifles hastily snatched up, they scattered through the bush in the direction in which the man had disappeared.

But they might as well have stayed round the fire for all the good they were able to accomplish. Both man and horse seemed to vanish utterly, and not even a sound could be heard of the horse's hoofs, let alone a sight of the rider. Darkness was also coming on and with that as an extra difficulty, the squatters soon abandoned their fruitless chase and returned to the camp fire.

The audacity of the man they were after amazed them, and as they stood round the fire discussing it, their words were as much of admiration as disgust for the utter disregard he had showed towards their number and superior strength. Directly they had reassembled, guards had been posted round the camp to prevent a surprise, and those who were not required to take part in the watch debated the chances of their being able to capture the leader of the gang.

"We may as well go home," one of them said. "Midnight is said to know every inch of the country for miles round here, and the way he rode through us and disappeared is quite proof enough for me."

"He must have ridden up very quietly, for no one heard him until he jumped out upon us," another observed.

"We've been too careless," Johnson said. "When Giles was with us he always told everybody what to do and they did it; but now that he is away, everybody leads for himself, and I tell you it won't pay while we are dealing with a man like Midnight."

"I believe you're right," the man who had first spoken said.

"Right? Of course it is right. That business at the cave ought to have been enough to warn us. We should have made arrangements there and then, instead of straggling along like sheep. Even when we stopped what was done? Everybody talked about mounting watches for the night, and while everybody talked, nobody acted, and the result was that Midnight was able to laugh at us and ride through our camp without a man being able to fire a shot. I vote for a leader and propose Trooper Farrell."

Farrell, who had been discussing the situation with his comrade, and arranging that they should share the task of watching the watchers through the night in order to avoid another fiasco, came over to the fire at the moment, having accepted the responsibility of mounting guard for the first half of the night while his comrade obtained what rest he could. He turned toward Johnson as he heard his name.

"What's that, Mr. Johnson?" he asked.

"We're deciding to follow a leader, and I've proposed you," Johnson answered.

"We want the leader, true enough, but I would not care for the job single handed. Better take it yourself," Farrell replied.

The suggestion was warmly accepted by all who heard it, and those who

were not on guard agreed after some further debate to regard Johnson as the leader both on that and subsequent expeditions in the place of Giles, who had turned tail at a critical moment, and for the present occasion Farrell and Wilton were joined in the command, the former as lieutenant, the latter as guide.

But the arrangement was made too late ; it was a case of locking the stable door after the horse was stolen. The guards were not alarmed once during the night, and by morning everybody thought that the game was up, and that the quarry had escaped.

The proposed leadership was ratified by the assemblage, and the first act of the new command was to despatch a party to follow the tracks made by the retreating bushranger the night before. They soon returned with the information that the tracks led to a hard, stony patch of country where every trace of them was lost.

"Then we'll push on to the flat and see what can be learned there," Johnson exclaimed.

They learned a good deal more there than they anticipated. The carcasses of Wilton's bullocks and the bushranger's horse were in an advanced state of decomposition, and the body of the bushrauger would have been the same only it had been almost destroyed by a big fire which had been built over it and which was still burning. The bridle and saddle had also been taken from the horse.

The water had drained from the flat, though the soil was still soft and muddy, and upon it recent impressions of horses' hoofs were everywhere evident. Johnson, Farrell and Wilton rode out to the dray which appeared from the distance to have canted over. When they came nearer to it they saw that the bushrangers had vented their spite still further in destroying what they could not use, and had cut through the heavy axle and damaged the wheels so much that the dray was nothing more than a useless wreck. A fire had also been lit in the space where Wilton had camped and the bales of wool hopelessly damaged.

"Blind, useless destruction," Johnson said as they viewed the wreck. "There's some excuse, though little enough, for them sticking up stations for food and money, but this sort of business is beyond everything. I would hang them or shoot them like rats if I came across them after this."

"It's a mean sort of thing to do, for there's neither gain nor revenge in it," Farrell added.

Wilton looked at his ruined property without speaking. It had been hard enough to lose his bullock team as he had done, but to have his dray wantonly destroyed with its load, and lose, not only all his belongings, but the money he would have earned by delivering the goods in Sydney, was a bitter experience.

Several of the other men had by this time ridden over and joined the three. When they saw what had been done, they were loud in their protestations of wrath against the destroyers, and of sympathy for Wilton.

Wilton sat on his horse, brooding over the disasters which had come upon him since the unlucky evening when, ignoring all suggestions of caution, he

had attempted to cross the flooded flat. If only he had been content to camp on the other side, he might have escaped the notice of the blacks, his bullocks might still have been alive, and he might have been miles on his journey to Sydney. Instead of which he had, through what he now termed his folly, rushed into a perfect network of trouble and despair, and after narrowly escaping with his life from friends and foes, found himself with all his property destroyed and the result of his five years' toiling thrown to the winds. He was looking towards the place where the track turned on to the flat and where he had halted his team while he tried the ground to see whether it would bear on that memorable evening, when he saw what made him shout to his comrades and gallop furiously away.

A horseman passed from the bush on to the opening of the track.

"There he is! Come on!" he shouted, and the band, hearing his voice and seeing him ride so madly away, took up the cry and followed him.

Farrell, managed to get alongside of him.

"Who is it?" he asked as they raced on together.

"Midnight," Wilton called back, his mind now filled with one idea, the revenging of his misfortune.

As they reached the track they caught another glimpse of the man, riding rapidly, away down the track in front of them, and Farrell called back to the galloping crowd behind him that one of the gang was in front. Wilton urged his horse to its topmost speed and drew away from his companions as he gained upon the fugitive.

Wilton felt his blood tingle as he saw how rapidly he was gaining on the flying bushranger until scarce fifty yards lay between them. He had the pistol he had taken from the man the blacks had speared, and he experienced a grim satisfaction as he drew it from his belt so as to be ready for action. They were now riding along a straight stretch of the track, and he was calculating how far it would be before he overtook the man in front of him, when the latter suddenly wheeled his horse into the bush, firing a shot at Wilton as he vanished among the trees.

Wilton followed his lead, and was crushing through the undergrowth towards the man whom he could still see at intervals through the open bush. Edging his horse nearer and nearer to him, Wilton was presently able to make out the man's face when he again swerved in his course gaining some yards in the suddenness of his manoeuvre.

Again and again he turned, but he was unable to shake off his persistent pursuer, who was too intent upon the chase to notice that none of his comrades had followed him off the track. He was only conscious of the fact that he was after one of the men who had done him such uncalled for injury, and his fierce desire for revenge obliterated every other feeling from his heart.

Suddenly he found himself again upon an open track, with the fugitive scarce ten yards ahead, and he shouted out to him to surrender. The bushranger turned in his saddle and laughed back at him.

The rage that had been smoldering seemed to burst into an overwhelming fury, and, urging his panting steed into one great final effort, he reached the side of the other, and, with his pistol leveled, cried to him to surrender.

The man laughed again as he swiftly raised his arm and flung his empty pistol into Wilton's face.

Instinctively Wilton pressed the trigger of his weapon. So intent was he upon the object of his revenge that he failed to make even the slight movement which was necessary to avoid the blow the bushranger aimed at him, with the result that he was struck with such force as to be rendered unconscious. But as his senses left him he saw his enemy fall forward upon his horse's neck, and in the keen satisfaction that he felt at his triumph he was oblivious to the stunning blow he had received, and knew not that he also fell from his saddle as the bushranger fell from his.

The horses, freed from their burdens, galloped down the track, side by side, leaving the two men lying where they fell. As they passed down the track two other men rode out of the bush, and seeing the riderless condition of the horses, turned and galloped in the direction whence they had come.

Directly they caught sight of the two figures lying in the roadway, they gave vent to long shrill coo-ees, the cry of the bush, and hastened towards the prostrate men.

CHAPTER VIII.—PLOVER'S REVENGE.

THE bushranger struggled to get up as Farrell and Johnson approached, and managed to raise himself up on his arm. But the effort was too much, and looking up at them with a pale, anguished face, he rolled over with a groan.

"He's badly hurt," Farrell exclaimed, as he leaped off his horse and stooped over him. Then he hastened to Wilton, just as he opened his eyes.

Johnson, who had also dismounted, raised him into a sitting position, and Farrell again turned his attention to the wounded outlaw who lay in a gradually increasing pool of blood.

"He won't last long, I'm afraid," he said.

Wilton, dazed and bewildered, looked from one to the other. A clattering of approaching horses, as the band closed in, filled the air; beside him he saw the man lying bleeding, and over him his two friends bent as they urged him to get up. The last memory he had was a feeling of intense joy at the sight of his falling foe; but now he shuddered as he looked at the form beside him. The sight of his ruined dray had maddened him; but now the fit had passed and he felt a bitter remorse as he looked upon the other wreck that he had made.

As the other men rode up, they glanced with concern towards Wilton as he sat propped up against Farrell and Johnson with his head turning from side to side and his eyes vacant and lifeless.

"Now then, my lad, freshen up, freshen up," Farrell exclaimed.

"Put him on his feet," one of the men called out, and he was lifted up until he stood.

"Now you're all right. You're not hurt badly," Farrell continued.

"Look at that," Wilton said, as he pointed to the man lying in the track.

"The best day's work you ever did," Farrell answered.

Some of the men had gathered round the wounded bushranger and noticing that he still breathed, one of them called out:

"There's time to hang him yet."

The suggestion was a little too brutal for the majority and a babel of protests arose.

"Remember Doolan," the man who had spoken cried fiercely.

"The wounded man opened his eyes, and in a weak voice said:—

"Doolan was one of us."

Had a blight of dumbness fallen upon the band they could not have been more silenced than they were at the remark of the dying outlaw. Wilton, who had been leaning against Farrell, started forward as he heard the sound of the man's voice. It was the voice he had heard, when he crouched among his woolbales, saying that they would treat him as they had treated Doolan.

"I reckon that's news," the outlaw said, a wan smile flitting over his face.

"Tell us more!" a man exclaimed, starting forward; but Wilton was before him. Facing the outlaw, he said:

"Doolan was speared because he—I heard you say that much before 'when I was on the dray——'"

The man looked at him, and into his eyes there came a gleam of anger.

"*You* were on the dray?" he said with an oath.

"Yes, the night you came with the blacks."

"That's all right, sonny," the man went on with a grim smile. "You're marked, you are. Doolan was marked, too, and what was done to him will be done to you. Midnight's not the man to forget who killed Sam Plover."

"Are you Sam Plover?" Farrell cried.

"You'd like to know, wouldn't you?" the man replied with another oath.

"Before it is too late, answer me one question, Farrell went on excitedly. "As you hope for mercy in Heaven, show mercy to the parents whose hearts you broke when you stole their child, and say now is she alive or dead?"

The man looked steadily at Farrell for a moment.

"What do you know about it?" he said.

"Man, do not trifle. You are on the brink of eternity; in another minute you may have gone. Right that one sin before you go. They never did you harm."

A spasm of pain contracted the dying man's face.

"Harm? *She* never did me harm? What am I now? What was I once? Go and ask her, and ask her who changed me."

"But the father. He helped you, and you told him——"

"Who are you that knows all about this?" the outlaw asked, his eyes gleaming horribly as they looked at Farrell.

"You have not forgotten what he saved you from once?" Farrell went on, speaking quietly.

"Who are you?" the man asked again, with less anger in his voice than he had before.

"You swore then that when the time came——"

"Who are you?" the man repeated, his voice weaker and softer than it had yet been.

"You would show you had not forgotten him," Farrell continued, not noticing the interruption.

With a final outburst of energy the dying man raised himself on his elbow.

"And I have not forgotten him, nor her," he shouted, as his eyes lit up again with passionate hate. "I swore to remember them both, and I have, he went on, with a harsh, mocking laugh. "You want to know, don't you? Then ask Midnight," and with a laugh that turned into a choked gurgle, he fell back—dead.

"Poor rascal," Wilton said sadly, when they had examined him and found that he was lifeless.

"One of the cruelest scoundrels that ever walked the earth, if he was Sam Plover," Farrell exclaimed warmly. "Don't waste pity on a heartless villain like that."

"What's the yarn about him, Farrell?" one of the men asked.

"I'll tell you tonight round the fire, and then you'll say, with me, that the shooting of Sam Plover is the best day's work any man ever did yet. Now we'll search him and see if we can get any clue as to the rest of the gang."

To make sure that nothing escaped their notice, they stripped the body of all its clothes and examined every pocket and place where anything could be hidden. But all they could find which was of any service to them was a scrap of paper containing the words, "All speared but Plover. At cubby house."

There was a long discussion over the meaning of this message. The first half, thanks to the information Wilton had supplied, was intelligible enough, but the last three words were meaningless, and there was also the further question as to whom the message was intended for.

"It's no use puzzling about that now," Johnson said at length. "It's enough to know that it will never reach the man, and we are just as much interested, I dare say, in knowing that all the gang were speared except Plover."

"And Midnight," some one put in.

"Yes, I'm afraid after last night that Midnight is all right," Johnson assented.

"In the meantime we had better bury this," Farrell said, indicating the body.

"Leave it where it is or burn it," one of the men exclaimed. "We've had bother enough with him and his mates, without worrying over their bodies."

Farrell looked at Johnson.

"Put a fire over it," Johnson said; and a few minutes later a huge fire was blazing over the dead outlaw, and the party, taking his horse, clothes and arms, rode away past the flat that had proved so eventful a spot for Wilton.

They were well on the road to the creek that ran near the blown up cave when a halt was called for the night. When they had disposed of their evening meal and sat smoking round their camp fire, some one called for Farrell to redeem his promise and tell them the yarn about Plover.

"It's a long story if you want everything," he answered; "but I'll tell it you as it was first told to me. I learned a good deal about the details of time and place later, but I reckon the main facts will be enough to keep you amused till it's time to roll in the blankets.

"The man came to the colony as a state official, and the appointment he held was one of the best to be had. By the same ship another official also voyaged, accompanied by his daughter, a handsome girl of seventeen. On the way out, Plover, as we will call him—though that was not his real name—became enamored with his colleague's daughter; but she does not seem to have returned his affection, and always treated him with more or less coldness. At the time they landed, some twenty five years ago now, there were only about half a dozen men in the place with whom the girl could associate, and of course Plover was one of those. Another was a young officer, who had also recently arrived, in charge of a small contingent of troops. This young gentleman soon became a rival with Plover for the young lady's hand and heart, and what was more, he succeeded where the other had failed. This was said to have preyed a good deal on Plover's mind, and he became seriously addicted to rum, then about the only intoxicant that could be constantly obtained in the place. From drink he went to other evils, and soon had about as ill a name in the settlement as any one who was not a member of the chain gang or an inmate of the refractory prisoners' quarters. Long before he reached that stage in his career, the lady naturally turned her back upon him, and he was generally shunned by the remainder of the decent people in the place—a proceeding which did not tend to make his mind easier or smooth his difficulties away. At last his conduct became so outrageous that it is said the governor informed him that he was free to return to England whenever he pleased. By that time affairs had progressed so well between the two lovers that their marriage was to be shortly celebrated. By some means or other—possibly because no one would associate with him—this piece of news did not reach Plover until after he had received the governor's intimation. It appeared at the trial that he first heard it through his convict servant while in a state of wild intoxication, and in return for the news, he flung something at the head of his informant and killed him on the spot. Had he stopped there he might have got away all right, for a convict, more or less, was very little worry to the authorities at the time. But in his maddened state nothing would serve him but that he must rush off in search of his rival. He found him at the house of his future bride, and dashing into the room, which was full of the respectable portion of the community, he made a furious attack upon the young officer. He had to be arrested then, and when his trial came on the murder of the convict was not included in the charge until the newly arrived judge heard of it, and, being enthusiastic, as most new arrivals are, insisted upon taking it into account, stating that while he was there, justice should be administered to all with an even and impartial hand. Plover was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment, and when he came out of jail he found that his rival had been married to the young girl for some months. To become a prisoner after having been a big official in a convict settlement does not tend to make a man very obedient to prison rule, and

Plover's record with the wardens at the end of the twelve months was as bad as it could be.

"Directly he got out he went straight to the young officer's quarters, and, of course, came face to face with his wife. She screamed and fainted, and the convict servants rushing in, had him secure in half a minute, for they had not forgotten their murdered mate nor the class of justice that had been given to the ex-official, and what would have been given to them had they killed even one of themselves. News was sent to the husband, and by the time he arrived on the scene, I dare say the case for the prosecution was all cut and dried among the convict witnesses. Plover was sent back to jail at once, and when he was brought up for trial the lady was too ill to appear as a witness. But the servants were there, and they told so specious a tale, and bore one another out so fully, even to the smallest detail, that the judge said it was absurd for Plover to assert their evidence was all lies, and that for his part he had never heard such admirable witnesses. They all got their tickets of leave, and Plover five years and a flogging. The latter part was commuted, at the earnest solicitation of the young officer, and Plover was sent away to help make the roads into the interior. Three years later there was a revolt in the camp and Plover, with others, escaped.

"The young couple in Sydney had in the meantime been blessed with a little daughter, who was their one great pride and joy. A month after Plover's escape the child vanished. She had been put to sleep in the afternoon and was under the care of a nurse, and no one had any idea of what had occurred until the time came and went when it was customary for the nurse to bring the little toddler down to meet her father on his return home for tea. Fearing nothing of what was in store for them, the young couple went up, arm in arm, to the nursery. On the floor the nurse lay, stabbed through the back, and on the child's cot a sheet of paper on which was scrawled, 'Sam the Plover's square at last.'

"It was a terrible blow to them as it was, for they did not at first know who 'Sam the Plover' might be; but when they learned that that was the prison nickname of their one time friend, the ex official, their grief was more than doubled.

"From that moment to this, nothing has been heard of the child. The parents are still living in Sidney, but are otherwise childless. Wealth has come to them, but neither has been the same since they discovered the loss of their baby, who, if living, would now be a girl of nearly twenty. Plover seems to have kept clear of the police ever since his escape, and it was generally believed that he must have perished in the bush, so that if we may regard his statement as the truth, the man Wilton shot is the man who has been for fifteen years defying every law in the land."

CHAPTER IX.—A DANGEROUS EXPERIMENT.

Wilton listened to the story with more than interest. He had blamed himself severely when he first saw the man lying, as he thought, dead; it had seemed to him such a terrible thing to slay a man as a recompense for a

broken dray. But now that he heard of the worse than wasted life his victim had lived, and the misery and unhappiness he had brought to others, his remorse vanished, and in its place he felt a proud emulation at his own deed.

"I'm not sorry I shot him," he involuntarily exclaimed.

"If the authorities will accept his word as evidence that he was Plover, it was a good stroke for you. There has been a reward out for years for him or proof of his death," Farrell replied.

"I wonder how you know so much about him," Farrell's comrade said.

"That is easy enough to explain," Farrell answered with a laugh. "My father was sergeant in the company that Major Pearson brought out. The major was only a lieutenant then and the old man a corporal, and of course he knew all the yarn about the rivalry between his officer and Plover. The old man's one song to me ever since I joined the police is, 'Find the major's daughter and shoot that villian Plover.'"

"And Wilton has taken half the job out of your hands," Johnson said.

"And I'll be only too pleased if he takes the other half and disposes of it in the same manner," Farrell replied.

A few days later the band dispersed. In the mean time Johnson had gone round his little circle suggesting that as Wilton had been rather roughly treated by them when he first met them, they might make up enough among themselves to enable him to buy a new team and dray in Sydney. The proposal had been readily acceded to, and when the two troopers and Wilton had parted from the main body, the latter had in his possession a variety of orders on Sydney agents totaling to a sufficiently large sum to set his mind at rest as to the re-equipment of his carrying requisites.

But there was yet another change in store for him. Upon his arrival in Sydney the shooting of Plover was reported, and all the other information which he had been able to obtain as to the later doings of the gang. The news reached Major Pearson, and he exerted himself to the utmost to obtain the promised reward for Wilton. The result was that a land order was given to him and he discussed with Farrell the best course to adopt.

"I'll tell you what I would do," the honest trooper answered. "I would apply for Meleelee Run. Doolan's dead, and as far as we know there is no one who can claim to be his heir. If the government give it to you, then you'll be in the district where Midnight generally is, and who knows but that you will be able to finish my task and find the major's daughter?"

"It's a bargain on one condition," Wilton said. "You saved me from being hanged and helped to find out who Plover was. If you agree to come and share the place, I'll apply for it. Then we can track Midnight together."

It took some persuasion to make Farrell agree, but in the end he consented, and again with the major's influence behind him, Wilton was allowed to use his graut in taking up the unoccupied run of Meleelee.

Instead of buying a team and a dray with the funds the squatters had given him, he devoted it to purchasing stock, the major insisting, upon considerably augmenting the capital of the two young partners. Wilton started off at once for the station, Farrell having to wait a month or so before he could get away from the service, and it was arranged that when he followed,

he should bring with him two or three consigned servants and collect the stock which Wilton was to buy on his journey up.

After leaving Sydney, Wilton traveled up to Johnson's station and told him of the change of fortune that had come to himself and Farrell.

"I shall be glad to welcome you as neighbors and we shall all feel satisfied to have you two handy the next time we have to turn out after our friend Midnight, as Giles has sworn never to go out with us again."

"How is he?" Wilton asked.

"Well, your heels have left a mark on him that will last as long as he does, and I am afraid he is rather bitter against you in consequence. It's a pity, because you are his next neighbor and he is a queer surly sort of man when offended. He must always have his own way to be happy. I would keep clear of him for a few months, if I were you."

"What about Midnight?" Wilton inquired.

"Nobody has heard or seen anything of him since he rode through our camp that night," Johnson answered. "The man is a perfect fiend for cunning."

As Wilton sat under the shadow of his veranda smoking his solitary pipe, the words came back to his mind. "And that is the man Farrell and I are going to best," he thought to himself. "I wonder what will be his next move?"

He rose from his seat and turning towards the door of the hut, he caught sight of a black fellow only a few yards away from him, in the act of raising his spear to throw.

Startled at the sudden appearance of a man when he considered himself absolutely alone, and that man, moreover, an evidently hostile black fellow, Wilton was, for the moment, unable to do more than stand still and stare. His surprise was increased when the black fellow, instead of hurling his spear, staggered forward and fell.

The first impulse that came to Wilton was to dash into the hut and seize his rifle which he had learned always to have handy. He was half way to the door when a sudden wave of compassion seemed to pass over him and he turned and went to the black fellow. As he stooped over him he gave an exclamation of horror, for he saw that the unfortunate creature's back was so hideously scored and cut, that it looked as if it had been flayed. There was only one instrument which could have inflicted such brutal injuries, and that was the "cat," with which unruly prisoners were beaten at the convict settlements.

Wilton stood over him wondering how and where the whipping had been administered, for the cuts were recent and were still bleeding. He had not got so far as to speculate by whom and why, when the black groaned weakly.

"Poor wretch, what agony he has been suffering!" Wilton thought compassionately, as he hastened to the hut from whence he brought such crude remedies as he had and tried to dress the wounds. The dressing was hardly worth the name from a surgical point of view, as cold water and an old, soft, worn out shirt comprised the entire stock of the appliances Wilton possessed in the medical line. But the application of the cool, soft bandages

eased the burning pain the black fellow suffered, and just as he recovered consciousness, he turned his head and glanced up into Wilton's face.

"My word, you good longa me," he said in broken English.

"What name you try kill me?" Wilton asked in the peculiar jumbled up language which the average white man, and especially if he is English speaking, always uses towards those whom he fancies do not understand his tongue.

"Baal me try it," the black answered. "Me think it Doolan, plenty bad feller, Doolan, my word, all longa same Midnight."

"Doolan's been dead for months," Wilton said as he tied the last knot to his bandage, and the black fellow weakly rose to his feet.

He was a splendid specimen of the aboriginal race, as it was before the white man's ruin, and the yellow man's opium had spread the hideous havoc, mentally, morally and physically, that afterwards degraded it. He was nearly six feet in height, with long clean lower limbs, and a beautifully modeled, muscular chest. As he stood up he reeled.

"Where you get hurt?" Wilton asked.

"Midnight. My word, debbil, that feller. Plenty long time no food."

It flashed into Wilton's mind that he now had the chance of learning something of the notorious bushranger's whereabouts, if he could only induce the black to talk. He had often heard of the treachery of the blacks, and how they were not to be trusted or believed, but as he looked at the fine eyes of the man before him he felt that here, at all events, was one who was not so entirely bad. At any rate he would try him; it might mean the discovery of Midnight's hiding place, and the risk was worth undertaking, for a big reward was offered by the government for the arrest of the notorious outlaw.

"You want tucker? You come along, but with me," Wilton said.

The black looked at him curiously.

"My word, you good feller," he said again, and he stooped down for his spears which lay on the ground beside him, and placed them in Wilton's hand. He took them and led the way into the hut. Then he gave the black some bread and meat and sat watching him as he devoured it.

When he had finished all there was before him, Wilton began to question him about Midnight and himself, and elicited some interesting information.

It appeared that the black was a member of the tribe that lived in some broken ridges near the head of the river which flowed through part of Melelee. The antipathy of the squatters towards the blacks, due very largely to the spearing of cattle by the unfortunate people who could not be made to understand that it was highly iniquitous to kill an occasional animal that belonged to the men who had taken possession of their country and did their utmost to destroy the game which was the chief means of livelihood to the natives; had led to an alliance, such as it was, between the tribe and the bushrangers in the district, chief of whom was the redoubtable Midnight.

While the squatters under Giles and Johnson had been "out" against one section of the outlaw community, another expedition had been organized by the settlers beyond the range against both the blacks and their allies. The result of that expedition had been equally disastrous for the enemy as

that with which Wilton had been associated, and the news of the reverse had been communicated to Midnight by the black Warrigal.

He explained, as well as he was able, that communication with Midnight was always made at a hidden cave in a deep, rocky gully which lay, so far as Wilton could gather, some miles behind his hut. Warrigal had arrived at the cave and had waited for Midnight.

The chief of the outlaws, he said, had come in a great rage, and when he heard of the defeat he knocked the messenger down, and binding him hand and foot, flogged him with a green hide whip until he was exhausted and had then left the cave and the unfortunate native, bound and bleeding.

After much difficulty, he had managed to get loose from his bonds, and burning for revenge, had hastened to Melelee where he knew one of the secret members of the gang lived. He had crept up behind Wilton, thinking that he was Doolan, when he sat smoking. He was just about to spear him when Wilton rose and faced him, and the surprise at seeing a different face from what the one he had expected, prevented his carrying out his intention.

"Then, my word, all got dark and me no savee," he said, by way of explaining the sudden collapse he had experienced.

"Where is Midnight now?" Wilton asked.

The black shook his head.

"Will you show me where the cave is?" Wilton asked.

"My word, Midnight kill me, kill you," Warrigal explained excitedly.

"No, he won't," Wilton said. "I shoot him."

Warrigal laughed. "No fear," he said.

"Why not?" Wilton inquired.

"Him plenty safe. You shoot him, my word, no good! Him shoot you, you dead."

"But why?" Wilton persisted.

"Suppose you want kill him, you shoot him there," Warrigal said, pointing to his eyes. "No good," he exclaimed, as he touched his head, chest and legs, and shaking his head vigorously all the time.

"Where you learn English?" Wilton asked, changing the subject with a view of suddenly returning to the Midnight question again and seeing whether the black would vary his story.

"Plenty long time, Sidney," Warrigal answered.

"Who with?" Wilton inquired.

Instead of replying, the black turned quickly towards the door and appeared to listen intently. Taking Wilton by the arm, he held up a warning hand as if for silence, and bent his head on one side. Then he pointed to the doorway and slipping to the back of the hut, crouched down out of sight behind a bag of flour and some other stores, which Wilton had placed there.

At the same moment Wilton caught the sound of an approaching horse.

CHAPTER X.—THE RESULT OF THE EXPERIMENT.

As far back as Mary Giles could remember, she had never known her father to have such a prolonged fit or savage temper as he had after his un-

expected return from the expedition he had led forth against the bushrangers, in order to avenge the murder of his nearest neighbor, Doolan of Meleelee.

She could not remember a great many years back, having barely seventeen to call her own since she had come into the world ; but that number was very much too small to account for all the occasions when the temper of her father had made her life a misery. When Johnson told Wilton that Giles was a queer, surly sort of man when offended, he only expressed half the truth, for, as his daughter knew only too well, it was not alone when he was offended that he exhibited those undesirable qualities.

The days went by, and still he maintained his morose savageness. Then Johnson had come, on his way home from the expedition, and he told Mary and her father of the successful termination of the campaign.

Giles laughed immoderately at the story of Midnight's dash through the camp.

"Why didn't you have guards out?" he asked.

"Why, indeed. That is what we all asked one another when it was too late," Johnson replied.

"And Wilton shot Plover, did he?" Giles went on. "Well, next to Midnight, he was the toughest of the gang, and it's no loss to the community that he is gone."

A chance reference made by her father to the fact that a new proprietor was coming to Meleelee, set Mary wondering and puzzling in a way that was entirely foreign to her, and when he said that he was going to ride over and see the newcomer, she was keenly on the alert.

When Wilton, going to the door of his hut to see who it was that was riding up, and whose horse's approach had been heard by the keen eared Warrigal long before the white man had discerned it, he was more than astonished to see Giles. He met him as he rode up to the door and noted the ugly scar that disfigured his forehead.

"So we're neighbors?" Giles called out in a friendly tone. "Well, we met under different conditions before, but I hope that won't interfere with our friendly relations. It won't on my part, I know."

Nor on mine, Mr. Giles. My hurting you was practically an accident, and your hurting me was about the same."

"That's so, my lad, and I'm glad to hear you say it. I'm glad you've come up here, especially now that you've shot Plover. The next best man is Midnight, and I suppose you'll be ready to have a go at him when you get the chance?"

"I shall," Wilton answered frankly.

"Well, good luck to you when you do ; but mind, you're not dealing with a fool when you do come across him."

Warned by Johnson, Wilton had anticipated that his first meeting with Giles would be of a very different character from this friendly exchange of views. When his guest dismounted and sat on the seat he had occupied when he discovered Warrigal, and chatted about the quality of the country, on Meleelee and its value for stock raising, he was more and more surprised.

"Well, I'll have to be going," he said at length. "I'll be glad to see

you at Billah when you can ride over, and there's only one bit of advice I can give you—if you see any niggers about, shoot them on sight. They come round sometimes, and if you don't shoot them they'll spear you or your cattle ; so don't waste time over it."

After he had ridden away, Wilton went inside the hut to see what had become of Worrigal. He walked over to the pile of stores and looked behind it, but no black fellow was there ; he glanced round the place and peered into every nook and cranny where the man could hide, but all in vain. He called out his name, first softly and then loudly, but received no answer. Warrigal had disappeared.

He came back to the doorway and stood musing. The black had not passed out through the door, he was certain, for either Giles or himself must have seen him. The hut was a small structure and its interior formed only one room, the door and a small window being the only openings for light, ventilation or traffic that the builder had thought worth while making. How then had Warrigal escaped ?

Glancing round over his shoulder, Wilton looked at the fireplace and its big wide chimney. He had not thought of that before, and crossing over the floor, he stooped and looked up the wide open space to the sky. There was ample room for a man to get up if he were as agile and nimble as a monkey, and Wilton knew that a black had both qualifications to perfection.

He went outside the hut and searched for any signs there might be which would confirm his suspicions. There may have been plenty, but Wilton was not skilled enough to read them, and he returned to the doorway feeling baffled and angry. The spears that Warrigal had placed in his hand had also vanished, and the words Giles had said to him came again to his mind and he felt that he had been in error in allowing his kindly sympathies to get the better of him when he turned to get his rifle and shoot the black who had threatened him.

"But he was such a fine looking chap," he mused. "It would have been downright murder to kill a man like that and in cold blood."

It never occurred to him to regard the black's disappearance otherwise than as a token of treachery. The anxiety he expressed in all his movements when he first heard the horse was ignored by the superior intelligence of the white man, who condemned merely because he could not understand. The readiness with which all his questions had been answered and the information he wanted given to him by Warrigal was also overlooked now that he had come across a course of behavior which did not quite recommend itself to him. It was the usual result when white met black. All that the white man expected the black never did, while he would do what no white man would ever dream of doing, nor could ever understand. And the result was a firm conviction of the innate treachery of the black and the necessity, as Giles had said, to shoot on sight, unless the white man wanted to be speared.

The same line of ideas occurred to Wilton as he stood musing at his door. He had allowed the black to see that he was the only man about the place, and had also exposed the stores which were inside the hut. It only required a touch of nervousness to make Wilton believe, at once, that the black had

been an emissary from a tribe, sent with their treacherous cunning, to ascertain whether an attack could safely be made upon the hut.

The soft sound of a distant coo-ee came to him through the still air of the evening. He turned to where his rifle was, and, taking it up, examined the primings carefully, without stopping to consider that if the black had sought to betray him, he would have taken all the weapons he could find, as well as his spears, when he made his escape. Wilton examined the pistol he had taken from the bushranger and which he still possessed. With it in his belt, and his rifle in his hand, he felt that he was better able to defend himself, and his mind grew calmer as he added his powder flask and a small bag of bullets to his equipment.

The darkness was gradually overcoming the last gleam of the setting sun, and he noticed that there was a crescent moon which gave just enough light to enable any one to make out the hut from the surrounding trees, but which rendered the shadows beyond impenetrable.

Wilton had heard of the method the blacks adopted in attacking a hut, and his own experience in the dray on the flooded flat also warned him that the worst place he could select as a shelter was his own roof. The system they worked on was very simple and very effective. As they approached the hut they were going to attack, the blacks gathered long shreds of dry, stringy bark or other fiber, and bound them, in loose sheaves, at the point of their spears. The huts being built entirely of wood, with perhaps large sheets of bark for the roofing, were, in the fine dry weather that obtained for the greater part of the year, little more than tinder boxes, and only needed a few sparks to set them ablaze.

When the blacks were foolish enough to attack the white men by daylight, their rude weapons had no chance against the death dealing rifles of the invader, and even at night the odds were in favor of the white man under ordinary circumstances. So the blacks set about evolving a scheme by which they could bring about an extraordinary series of circumstances. Perhaps some of their allies among the outlawed whites helped them, but it was not long after settlement commenced before a new terror was added to the list of drawbacks to locating in the interior.

Usually when on the march, the blacks carried a "fire stick," which consisted of a peculiar wood that smoldered in a hot red point, blazing into flame when fanned or gently blown upon. The application of the three ideas, the fire stick, the sheaves of inflammable fiber, and the dry roof, to one another, produced to the aboriginal a new and powerful weapon of attack. Creeping up near a lonely hut at night when the men inside considered they were safe, at all events from surprise, glowing cinders from the fire stick were dropped into the sheaves of fiber, and the spear hurled at the dry bark of the roof.

Terrified by the sudden outburst of the conflagration, the inmates rushed from the burning hut under the impression that the bush was on fire. The light from the blazing roof showed them distinctly to their hidden enemies, and before they knew their danger, a flight of spears was upon them, and they fell on the threshold of their home.

It was an admirable arrangement for the blacks, and many a brave fellow

has been awakened from his sleep by the roar of fire over his head, to rush to the door in an effort to escape but only to rush into the death trap set for him.

It did not take Wilton very long to make up his mind what to do.

CHAPTER XI.—MIDNIGHT VISITS MELEELEE.

ABOUT a hundred yards from the door of the hut there was the remains of a big fallen tree. It had evidently come down in some by gone bush fire, for its outer side was charred and burnt, and the little that remained standing above the roots was also burnt and black. But its fall had been of marvelous benefit to a subsequent growth, and the space it had cleared when it fell was now crowded by a growth of young saplings and bushes.

Directly it was dark enough for his movements not to be observed by any one who might be watching, Wilton crept round under the shadow of the veranda into the bush behind the hut. Thence he cautiously made his way to the clump of saplings, and lying down close under the fallen log, rested his rifle upon it and watched the door of the hut.

Silently the hours passed, and he lay still, listening intently for any sound that might signify the approach of his enemies. But the night wore on slowly and his ears caught nothing more than the ordinary noises, dim and indistinct, of the sleeping bush. The moon was waning, and its weak slanting beams illuminated the open spaces enough to make the shadows beyond absolutely impenetrable.

With his senses keenly on the alert, Wilton was convinced, in his own mind, that an attack was to be made upon him; and, as the time passed, the suspense and uncertainty began to tell upon him, and he wished he had ridden away after Giles, directly he discovered that Warrigal had gone. Then he wished that he had waited until Farrell could have come up with him, for as he lay in the silence and half light, the story of how the previous owner of Meleelee had met his end, forced itself upon his already strained nerves.

The crackle of breaking twigs sounded through the air, and instantly he tightened his grip upon his rifle. A moment later and he saw a dark figure stealthily creeping toward the door of the hut from the shadow of the bush.

Wilton felt his nerves in a tremor as he watched the man, crouched down and moving with a wonderfully silent stealthiness towards the hut. The faint glimmer of the fading moonlight was just sufficient to show him up as a dark shadow, but was not enough to enable Wilton to see whether he was black or white, clad or naked. The way in which he moved suggested the black, and presently, noticing an indistinct something which looked very like a spear trailing behind the figure, Wilton made up his mind that it was either Warrigal or another member of his tribe.

The parting advice of Giles flashed through his memory, and he glanced along the sight of his rifle as well as he could, so as to get a steady aim at the man. His finger was on the trigger, and he was about to pull it, when discretion came to him and he hesitated. Supposing that the man were only one member of the tribe, who was creeping upon the hut in order to ascertain

whether the inmate was prepared for the attack? To fire upon him as he crept up would be to alarm the remainder, while the flash of the rifle shot would at once locate the place where Wilton was hiding.

On the other hand, if he were alone, there would be plenty of time and a better opportunity when he emerged from the hut, as he was sure to do directly he discovered that Wilton was not within. Discretion was certainly the better part of valor, if either of these ideas were correct, and with his finger still on the trigger, Wilton moved his rifle slowly round so as to cover the advancing figure, and be ready to fire at any moment.

He saw him reach the shadow of the veranda and stand up, and, as he did so, Wilton noticed that he was clothed. It was sufficient to tell him that the man was white, and an ugly suspicion crossed his mind. Warrigal had spoken of Midnight as being in the neighborhood, but what if he had been merely a spy sent forward by Midnight to learn how many men there were in the hut? What if the man who was now at the door of the hut were Midnight himself? Wilton felt his heart leap at the thought. He could cover him directly he came from the hut, and fire when he was sure of his aim, and then with the great outlaw dead or wounded, he could claim from his neighboring squatters a recognition better even than that which he had already received.

He lay, scarcely breathing, as he heard the hut door pushed gently open. Then an unbroken silence reigned, and he knew that the man, whoever he was, was creeping towards the stretcher where, under ordinary circumstances, he himself would be lying asleep. A shudder passed over him as he thought of his fate had he been in the hut, for he had little doubt now but that the man was bent upon assassination. And what resistance could he have offered had he been suddenly awakened to find an armed man standing over him, perhaps with the muzzle of a rifle pressed against his forehead, or the point of a dagger at his throat.

Then came the sound of rapid footsteps from the interior of the hut, and, gripping his rifle tightly, Wilton watched for the man to reappear. The hut door grated as it was flung back, and just as the last of the moonlight flickered the ground, the man stepped from under the veranda and glanced round.

Wilton felt his heart stop, and then beat and throb in the excitement of the moment, for there, barely fifty yards away, stood the unmistakable figure of Midnight.

With his rifle aimed point blank at the broad chest of the outlaw, he pulled the trigger. The report of the shot sounded so loud to his overstrained nerves that he sprang up as he heard it, and so was able to see over the smoke that hung along the ground, able to see the bushranger stagger back, and hear the hoarse exclamation which broke from his lips.

Wilton shouted in the ecstasy of victory as he leaped forward, pistol in hand, to challenge the man to surrender or die. But he had forgotten who his opponent was.

As he came out of the shade of his protecting bushes, he saw Midnight raise his rifle. In the recklessness of the excitement which was upon him, Wilton aimed his pistol and pulled the trigger. There was a little flash and

a puff of smoke, and a mocking laugh came from Midnight. The pistol had missed fire.

With his rifle empty, and his pistol useless, Wilton was at the mercy of the man whom common report said was merciless. The desperate position he was in came to him more quickly than he could have thought, and he turned and sprang into the shelter of the bushes. He heard the report of the bush-ranger's rifle; something whizzed past his ear, burning it as if a piece of hot iron had touched it; a horrible sense of fear swept over him, and Wilton fled for his life.

Neither heeding nor thinking where he was going he rushed madly forward, crashing through the undergrowth, tripping and stumbling over fallen logs and projecting roots, until suddenly the trees ceased, and before and around him he realized that there was open space. The fear of the man, whom he believed was only a few paces behind him, gave him the energy of despair, and he rushed onwards, blindly and wildly.

The ground went from under his feet; there was a mighty rush of air, and he knew that he was falling. It was only a few seconds of time; but it was as a lifetime to him as he looked upwards and backwards, and saw a long thin tongue of flame shoot out from the blackness of the bush that he had left, and the report of a rifle shot echoed through the night. Then he struck water with a splash, and sank into the cold flood.

Fortunately, he was an able swimmer, and as soon as he felt himself in the water his senses returned to him. He struck out and slowly rose to the surface, his wits about him, and the terror that had urged him to his headlong flight gone. As his head came above the water he glanced quickly round, ready to dive should he see anything of his enemy. He comprehended then where he was. He had plunged into the river from the top of a high bluff, and the stream had already carried him far enough away for him to be able to look back to where the bluff stood out, black against the dim light. From behind it there showed a faint gleam which, even as he watched, increased, until a blaze of light showed through the night.

Midnight had set fire to his hut.

Full of bitterness and anger Wilton swam to the shore, and was making his way back through the bush towards his burning hut before he quite grasped the folly of his action. His empty rifle he had left on the log, when he sprang up to complete his conquest of the redoubtable Midnight; his pistol he had dropped in his rapid flight, and he was now empty handed and unarmed, and yet was going back to face a man who was not only armed, but so cool and collected that he could use his weapons even in the face of such dangers as had recently threatened him.

Wilton paused in his hurried walk. If he wanted to effect anything, he would have to act cautiously and thoughtfully. He stood for a while, debating with himself the best course to adopt, and then walking silently and carefully, he crept towards the blaze which showed through the trees.

When he had approached near enough to see the flaming structure, which was all that was left of his hut, he stopped, for between him and the fire he saw Midnight standing and watching the burning mass. He had his back to

Wilton, who closely studied the broad shouldered figure, bitterly regretting the fact that he was without arms, and therefore unable to take advantage of the more than favorable opportunity to rid the world of one against whom he now had double reason to bear malice.

The outlaw stood with his arms resting on his rifle, and Wilton, as he looked, noticed that the man's shoulders were very much out of proportion to his height. The long black hair escaped from under his hat, and fell around his head in a heavy fringe. As he watched there recurred to his mind the words of Warrigal when he said, that to shoot Midnight one would have to aim at the eyes. With the thought there came another, suggested by the clumsy appearance of the man's body. Midnight moved at the same moment, and the thought was confirmed. The man had some protecting armour under his coat.

"I'll keep the idea to myself," Wilton thought, fearing that he would be ridiculed if he mentioned it to any one; "but the next chance I have at him I'll aim at his eyes."

Midnight watched the fire until the hut was only a mass of glowing embers, and then turned and walked away through the bush, with his rifle over his shoulder, towards the direction in which Warrigal had pointed when he located the bushranger's lair.

Wilton waited until he could no longer hear him before he crept round to the log where he had hidden. His rifle still lay where he had left it, and after a search he also found his pistol. Loading them with the ammunition he had, he gave a last glance at the ruin of his hut and started off for Billah, to appeal to Giles to rouse the countryside, and hunt the outlaw from his hiding place.

CHAPTER XII.—WILTON REPORTS PROGRESS.

It was a long and weary walk through the dark bush, and the sun just rising above the horizon when Wilton caught sight of Billah homestead. He pressed on to the house, and was stepping on the veranda when Giles appeared at the doorway.

"Hullo, my lad, what brings you over at this hour? And what's the rifle for?" he exclaimed.

"I've been stuck up and my hut burned by that villain Midnight," Wilton replied.

"Stuck up? You don't say that! Midnight stuck you up, and you escaped with your life?" Giles cried.

"It was a near thing, I can assure you. I went over the bluff into the stream, and that saved me, I think," Wilton answered, as he sat down.

"You're wounded," Giles said excitedly, pointing to the blood which had flowed from the cut Midnight's bullet had made on his ear.

"It's only a scratch," Wilton replied. "I'm more tired than hurt at present, for I had to tramp it over here."

"And here I am, not even asking you inside! Come in, my lad, and welcome. Your news knocked everything else out of my head."

He led the way into the house, and Wilton followed him inside the door and then stood still, as he caught sight of Mary, who had just entered the room from the other side.

"You did not expect to see any petticoats in this part of the world, I'll be bound," Giles said with a laugh, as he saw the surprise depicted on Wilton's face. "This is my daughter Mary," he went on. "Mary, this is our new neighbor, Mr. Wilton—the man who shot the bushranger—and he'll have breakfast."

Mary, taken aback at the sudden appearance of a stranger, was even more surprised at the good humor her father was in, as the night before, when he came in after having been over to Meleelee, he was surly and morose. She glanced from him to Wilton, who still stood looking at her as though he had never seen a woman before. But his eyes were kindly, and his face open and manly, and she did not shrink from his look as he did from those of the majority of the men who came to see her father.

"How do you do?" she said simply, as she came over to him and held out her hand, an action which surprised her when she thought over it subsequently. For even such minor courtesies were not current in the bush during the earlier pioneer days, when the rough and tumble of everyday life was far too serious a business to leave either time or energy for useless and artificial forms of salutation.

"Were you ever in Sydney?" Wilton asked.

"Oh, you are wounded!" she exclaimed, as she saw the red stain on his shoulder. "You have been hurt!"

"It is nothing," he said, and was about to repeat his previous questions, when Giles interrupted him.

"Midnight had a shot at him, and spoiled his reputation by a miss," he said, with a loud laugh. "You can bet he'll be nearer the mark next time."

"Oh, father!" said Mary, turning towards him.

"Go and hurry breakfast along," he said. "I'm hungry—and so is Wilton after his little entertainment, I'll be bound."

Then, when she had left the room, Giles asked a dozen questions about the experience Wilton had undergone.

"How was it you managed to get out?" he asked. "Did Midnight open the door for you?"

"I wasn't inside when he came up. I was fearing an attack from the blacks, and foolishly put off doing what I should have done until it was too late. Indeed it did not occur to me until it was too late."

"What?" Giles asked.

"I ought to have ridden over here," Wilton answered, "or told you when you were over."

"It may be all right, but I'm hanged if I can make out what you are talking about!" Giles exclaimed.

"The blacks," Wilton said.

"Blacks? What blacks?" There's no blacks round this part! We cleared them out long enough ago, except a few who loaf about the stations. But they would not hurt you."

"Did you ever hear of one called Warrigal?" Wilton asked.

Giles, who was sitting down, sprang to his feet with a sharp exclamation, while his eyes gleamed in a sudden outburst of rage, and an ugly frown puckered his brows.

"Warrigal?" he cried. "Where did you see Warrigal?"

"He was in the hut when you came yesterday."

An imprecation came from Giles' lips.

"He had escaped from Midnight," Wilton continued.

"Escaped? Great heavens, man, do you know that he is Midnight's right hand man, and that when he's killed a score of men will be avenged? In your hut? And you did not shoot him? If I had only known, I would soon have settled him. He's done more harm than all his tribe. And you let him off! It's a marvel that you're alive to tell of it."

"I pitied the poor wretch," Wilton said. "He told me where Midnight's hiding place is to be found."

Giles laughed shortly. "Then take my advice and forget all about it, for it will either be a lie or a trap. Wait till you meet the black demon again and then shoot him. It will be the best way of letting him know that you did not believe his yarn."

"Well, I should have been killed in my bed last night if it had not been for him," Wilton answered.

"Why? Did he tell you that his chief was coming to see you?"

"No! He vanished while we were talking, and I suspected treachery, so lay in hiding waiting for the attack which I expected would come. While I was watching I saw a man creep up to the hut. I let him get inside, although I had my rifle covering him all the time. When he came out I fired."

"And missed," Giles exclaimed.

"I suppose I did, as he didn't drop," Wilton said.

"What then?" Giles asked quickly.

"I tried my pistol, but it missed fire."

"And didn't Midnight pot at you in return?"

"Yes, but I ran for it. The bullet grazed my ear and I bolted as hard as I could, so hard that I ran right over the bluff. He fired at me as I was falling but in the dark he missed me, and when I came to the surface again I saw the glare of the fire he had made in the hut. Then I crept back and watched him as he stood looking at my hut burn. When he had gone I searched for my rifle and pistol, which I had dropped in my excitement, and after I had found them came on here to give the alarm."

Giles looked at him fixedly for some moments without speaking. Then he came over and took him by the hand.

"You're a cool chap," he said, looking at him with his keen gray eyes.

"You're a man after my own heart, and if Midnight is ever shot—for I'm sure he'll never be taken alive—I hope you do the shooting."

"I mean to," Wilton said. "I've a double score to settle with him now."

"Have a care, my lad. Midnight is not a baby to play with," Giles said seriously. "He'd think no more of shooting you——"

"Than I would of shooting him," Wilton interrupted in an angry tone.

"You mean business," Giles remarked quietly.

"I do," Wilton answered.

"But how are you going to carry it through?"

"Get the squatters out again and hunt him to his lair."

"You can't do it. We've tried that till we're full of it. A chance meeting is what you'll have to trust to."

"I'm going to try it, and if I cannot get any one else to join me I'll wait till Farrell comes up with the stock and we'll go together."

"You'll do better to go slow for a time; He probably believes he settled you when you went over the bluff, and may be miles away by this time on his road to some other of his haunts, for he is not a man who stays long in one place. You lie low until you hear of him again and then turn out. I fancy the boys have had enough of the last trip to last them for a time."

"But did they ever know where to look for him?" Wilton asked.

"He's been looked for everywhere, not only round here but on the tableland and over the ranges. He's dodged the police and the squatters and every one else for years, and I tell you plainly you are taking on a big contract when you undertake and hope to track Midnight."

"But has no one ever found his hiding place?"

"No, and no one ever will. Even if they did they would never live to tell of it, for I can assure you it is not an easy matter to get at a man like that without his knowing it."

"I suppose he has spies all over the place to warn him," Wilton said.

"I don't know about that," Giles answered thoughtfully. "But I do know that as soon as an expedition is organized he vanishes, and directly the expedition disperses he turns up under the very noses of the men who were out chasing him."

"He's a plucky chap," Wilton exclaimed. "However bad he may be, I can't help admiring his pluck. Warrigal said that another branch of his gang had been dispersed beyond the ranges, besides the lot we smashed up, and yet he turns out again, as bold as ever, and sets to work single handed."

"So you admire him?" Giles said with a short laugh.

"I admire his pluck. His going for me suggests that he has heard of my shooting his mate, and if that doesn't mean spies I don't know."

"It looks like it, certainly; but how do you hope to get at his hiding place if there are spies about?"

"I haven't mentioned it to any one but you, and I hardly fancy you're likely to give him warning," Wilton answered laughingly.

"Well, hardly," Giles said. "They made me a J. P. because I used to get the fellows out after him so often, and it would be playing it a bit low down for me to give him the tip, wouldn't it?" he added, joining in the laugh. "Besides which, he stole the best horse I ever had, and has paid me many a compliment by driving off my cattle."

"In return for your interest in him, I suppose," Wilton said.

"But now that he has taken you up, I hope he'll leave me alone," Giles remarked.

"You'll join if there's another turn out after him?" Wilton asked.

"I'm tired of it," Giles answered. "Go over to Johnson and see what he says, though I doubt whether he will encourage you. The mustering will be on soon, and the boys don't want to be flying over the country when they've enough to do minding their own business. Besides, it's time the police did something. We cleared the blacks out ourselves, and we've done most of the hunting after the bushrangers and escaped convicts. It's all very well now and again, but I fancy we're all pretty tired of it now."

"The last one was fairly successful."

"Yes, in a way. But it nearly did for you," Giles said with a laugh. "It marked me a bit, too, and I'm not anxious for any more like it just yet."

"The next one may finish the matter," Wilton said.

"For me or for you?"

"For Midnight."

"Yes, it may; but the near shave you had last time may be nearer. You've got off twice, my lad, and it's bad to risk a third chance."

"I'm inclined to, all the same," Wilton replied.

CHAPTER XIII.—MARY AWAKENS.

WHETHER it was due to the excitement he had experienced the previous night, or the long tramp through the bush from Melelee to Billah, Wilton was not sure, but he had a marvelous appetite when breakfast was served, and his spirits were at their highest as he sat opposite Mary and chatted as blithely as though there were no such things as bushrangers and burned huts in the land.

She was unused to the society of any one who could talk about anything beyond stock and the chances of drought or flood, with the one exception of Johnson, and during the meal she frequently found herself comparing the new owner of Melelee with her friend. But great as her opinion of Johnson was, the comparison between him and Wilton was generally in favor of the latter, for not only did his conversation please and entertain her, but it also pleased her father so much that she heard him laugh so heartily that the dim, far off memory of bygone happy days came to her clearer and stronger. If only she could make him laugh like that, she thought as she glanced at him, how much brighter the days would be than they were.

Wilton was telling them of his experience in the dray when he was stuck up by the flood on the flat, and Giles was bantering him, good humoredly, about his taking no notice of the warnings that had been given him by older and more experience carriers.

"Just as you refuse to listen to me now about Midnight," he said.

"Well, there's a reason for my wish to settle him," Wilton said gravely.

"What, another? Are not the two enough that you have given—your burnt dray and burnt hut?"

"Were you ever in Sydney?" Wilton asked, looking over at Mary.

"She has never been away from Billah," Giles answered for her. "But what's this new reason?"

"Your daughter reminded me of it," Wilton said thoughtfully. "But if she has never been away from here——"

"Oh, I have," Mary said. "I can just remember, long ago, before we came here."

"What do you remember?" Giles asked curtly.

Mary looked away through the window without apparently heeding the tone of her father's voice.

"It is clearer today than I ever remember it," she said softly, as though she were speaking more to herself than to her companions. "That time, so long ago, before we came here. There were a lot of houses, big ones and little ones, and a lot of water."

"You don't say you remember all that?" Giles asked, and Wilton glanced at him as he heard his voice. His face depicted the surprise that the tone expressed.

"Wait a moment; there's some more," Mary continued. "I seem to be just—I don't quite know how to put it," she said as she pressed her hand to her forehead and her eyes grew moist.

"It was when she was a child; when her mother died," Giles said to Wilton. "I did not know she remembered it. I hoped she had forgotten it. Do you remember how you fretted, Mary?"

"I remember crying for a long time," she answered softly.

"Well, if you remember so much, I will help you, for I dare say you are old enough now to look at it sensibly," Giles remarked. "You see Wilton, it was a hard blow to me. I was ruined, and my wife died at the same time, and then I found myself with Mary here, who was a little girl of a year or so, just toddling, and all my work to be done over again. It was a case of seeking fresh land out further back, and I had to travel and carry the little one with me till we found this patch, and I obtained the grant. She cried her eyes nearly out for her mother, and then used to cry, whenever she wasn't asleep, to go back. It was a hard time for me, and I don't like talking about it," he added with a heavy sigh.

Mary was sitting silent and abstracted. The brief story that her father told threw a flood of light upon her memory, for she could understand the reason now of his moody temper. She had unconsciously made his lot the harder at the most painful period of his existence, and it was not to be wondered at that he, at a later period, should have been estranged from her. Here was the secret that she had often tried to fathom for herself, the secret why her father had ceased to be the happy, contented man she just managed to recall, and why he had become so morose and dissatisfied. She was not schooled in matters of the affections; she had grown to womanhood with no other guide or companion than old Narli; but the heart of a sympathetic woman had developed upon its own lines, and now awakened to the first touch that it had ever felt. She rose from her seat and, going over to her father, she threw her arms round his neck and she said brokenly:

"Oh, why did you not tell me before? I never knew, and I have wondered so much."

Wilton, watching the two, saw Giles' eyes light up, and into his heart

there came a great longing, something that he had never felt before, and something that seemed to change and alter him in the passing of a second. The recollection of his burned hut, his wish to hunt Midnight down, his anxiety to build up wealth, all faded before this new impulse which swept over him and carried Mary Giles up to the very pinnacle of his being and set her there as his idol and his love.

He saw Giles loosen his daughter's arms and gently push her away, but he did not catch the words he uttered, and which brought a rich mantling flood of color to Mary's face.

"Come, let us have a smoke and a yarn," Giles said abruptly, as he rose from the table and walked out on the veranda.

Wilton saw Mary's eyes looking after him, while her lip trembled, and as he passed her he looked into her face and held out his hand. He intended to say something, but as she took it his mind forgot what it would have expressed, and he turned away, confused and distressed, and followed Giles out.

So he did not see the light that came into her eyes and the smile that rippled over her face before she turned and went to her own room. She sat upon her roughly constructed bed, smiling, happy and joyful, for although her father had repelled her when she attempted to show him the affection she felt for him, another had come into her life, and, in her unsophisticated manner, she did not for a moment trifle with the state of her feelings.

Thus, at the same time, the two had installed each other as the sovereign of the heart, and only a little more was needed of that sympathy which had arisen for their eyes to be opened and those words to be said which would link their two lives into one. Untrammelled by the rules of conventional society, there was no wish on either side to conceal, and only the opportunity was wanting when, as naturally as flowers turn to the sun, he would turn to her, and she to him, and in the union of their loves the big battle of life be begun.

As Wilton joined his host on the veranda all desire to discuss the situation had vanished before the new interest which had come into his life. He sat down and let his mind go into a dreamy reverie, from which he was rudely awakened by Giles asking if he were not going to smoke.

Mechanically he took his pipe from his pocket and began cutting up his tobacco.

"Now, what's your next move?" Giles asked. "I suppose you'll put up a new hut for Midnight to burn down again?"

"I hardly know yet," Wilton replied.

"It's the best thing you can do, and I dare say if you pass the word round you'll have all the help you want. For my part I have to get away over the ranges to see after some cattle that are offered to me, and I was going to start this morning; but I can delay that for a bit."

"And leave your daughter all alone here while Midnight is about?" Wilton exclaimed.

"Oh, she's all right. He's too busy with his gang to bother about her, and besides, I shall bring back some one who will take her off my hands."

Wilton looked at him in surprise. There was a ring of callous indifference

ence in his voice that jarred on the man, who was just beginning to realize that Mary Giles was worth very much more consideration than her father showed her.

"It's an awful drag to have women about you in the bush," Giles went on. "It will be a relief to me to have her settled somewhere."

Wilton was about to say that perhaps there were some people who would be only too ready to undertake the responsibility, but before he could do so Giles continued:

"However, that has nothing to do with the situation. If I have to go, Johnson is not far off, and he'll be better able to set you up with tools and all the rest of it than I shall."

"I fancy I will wait until Farrell gets up before I start a new hut. A tent will do for me in the mean time."

"Then Johnson is the man to see, for he has one or two, but mine went into holes a year back and I never replaced it yet."

The constant suggestion that Johnson was the best man to refer to gave Wilton a suspicion that Giles was not too anxious for him to stay longer at Billah than was absolutely necessary.

"I'll ride over—but I forgot; my saddle and bridle were inside the hut and were burned along with the rest of my things. I'll have to borrow a bridle from you, so that I can catch my horse."

"That will be all right. I can let you have a mount, but you need not be starting at once. You'll want a rest after last night. Have a camp for a few hours."

"I don't feel it yet, but I reckon I'll have a spell in the afternoon. I can get to Johnson's by that time if I start soon," Wilton said.

"What's the hurry?" Giles asked. "There's a lot to yarn about before you go."

"I want to get the news round as soon as I can," Wilton said.

"What! still bent on shooting that poor wretch?"

"There's another reason why we should be out after him, if you are going to leave Billah unprotected during your absence," Wilton replied.

"We can, at all events, make the place too hot for him round about here, and then Miss Giles need not be afraid."

Giles laughed. "She can take care of herself, never you fear. I believe she'd give a warmer reception to Midnight than you would! She's no end of a shot with a rifle."

"But it's very risky," Wilton continued. "If he's kept on the move he would not be so likely to flourish as he does."

"Well, my lad, as I tell you, I can't join in with you because I have to be over the ranges for two very important matters, one, the buying of stock, and the other, the bringing home of a mate for Mary."

"She is going to be married?" Wilton exclaimed.

"And why not? Surely she's old enough; and I shall not be sorry to get the place free of petticoats; they're more than a nuisance in the bush."

"Is it to a squatter?" Wilton asked.

"Well, I reckon so. There was one after her, but she scared him off and

he went home without her. Still, there are yet plucky young chaps beyond the ranges, and I count on bringing one back all right."

"But she may not——" Wilton began.

Giles looked at him quizzically.

"May not?" he said. "Well, I manage things here, and if she does not choose to follow her father's advice in such a matter as this, she'll have to put up with what follows."

"You mean that she would have——"

"I mean that I'd not be bothered any more with her up here."

Wilton sat smoking in silence for some minutes while he thought rapidly and clearly. It was very evident that the father had little real affection for the girl, and that his chief desire now was to get her, as he put it, off his hands. It was impossible to conjecture what sort of a man he might be who was to be brought from over the ranges, but whoever he was, Wilton felt, with all the jealous apprehension of a lover, that he would be particularly repugnant to Mary. It was quite sufficient, in his state of mind, to determine him, and he said quickly:

"There are men this side of the range as well as the other."

Giles eyed him critically before he answered.

"What of that?"

"One of them might be prepared to take your daughter——"

"Meaning yourself?" Giles interrupted, leaning forward and looking into Wilton's face.

"Why not?" he replied evasively, not caring for the keen, suspicious scrutiny of the other's eyes.

"Well, my lad, because there's next door to no stock on Meleelee, and what there is belongs to two men; because you're a marked man with the gang and will never be safe till they're all wiped out, and otherwise, because you might leave a widow any day, and lump the burden on to me again. And, if you want any more reasons, because I've passed my word to two smart young chaps over there that they have first say. One of them came and went, and now the other has a run for it. After that, supposing he shies, too, like his mate did, there may be a chance for Meleelee, but it's a poor one at any time."

CHAPTER XIV.—THE TRACK PASSES BILLAH.

As if to prevent any further discussion of the matter, Giles inquired when Farrell was expected to reach Meleelee. Wilton, feeling irritated at the manner in which the other had received his approaches with regard Mary, answered shortly.

"What route will he take?" Giles asked, ignoring the brusqueness of the other's reply.

"That is more than I know, except that he will have to come round by Dimsdale's, down the river, for there's some stock there for him to pick up."

"When was he to leave Sydney?" Giles asked.

"About a week since," Wilton answered.

"Then by three weeks he will be here, so you won't have much time for your expedition if you are going to meet him when he arrives," Giles remarked, and Wilton, thinking very much about other matters, did not reply. He was debating with himself whether Mary would receive his overtures in the same off hand manner as her father had done, and had just begun to urge the advisability of trying with Mary herself when Giles interrupted his thoughts.

"You'll be asleep in a minute," he exclaimed with a laugh. "Go and have a rest, and I'll have the horses in by the time you are awake."

It was a pointed hint, but Wilton preferred not to accept it in view of his latest idea, and contented himself by saying that he would have a brief spell before starting. Giles showed him a stretcher and he lay down upon it, but not to sleep. His mind was far too actively engaged in scheming how he could carry out his newly formed intention of winning Mary, even in spite of her father's objections.

He wished that Farrell were near so that he could discuss the matter with him, and in deploring the fact that he was not at hand Wilton remembered Johnson.

"Giles was very anxious for me to consult him on every other subject, and I'll take his advice and see what he has to say about this," Wilton thought.

The decision he had come to made him more impatient than ever to be away, and rising from the stretcher he went on to the veranda again. There he found Mary, who smiled as she saw him.

"Father said you were worn out after last night, and were sleeping," she said.

Had he found Giles on the veranda it is probable that he would have been on his way to Johnson's a few minutes later, but the appearance of Mary upset all his ideas, and instead of going he now wanted to stay.

"Your father—he has——" he began lamely.

"He has gone away to bring in a horse for you, he said, and will not be back for an hour or so. Are you going away at once?" she said.

"Yes," he answered. "That is, soon. I want—I have to——"

He felt as awkward and as speechless as a log as he stood looking at her and watched the smile that played over her face.

"Get help for building the hut. Yes, I heard you and father talking," she said.

Heard him and Giles talking! If he had been confused before he was ten times worse now as he recalled his words about her, and which she must have heard if she had listened.

"You heard us?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, about your going to Johnson. I'm glad you know him. He's my best friend, I think," the girl said wistfully.

"Not your best," Wilton said, with a twinge of jealousy in his heart.

"Well, next to father, I suppose," she answered. "I've known him so long, and he's so nice. Not a bit like——" and she hesitated.

"Like me," Wilton exclaimed.

"Oh, no, not you," the girl said quickly as she looked him in the face with a light in her eyes that sent Wilton's blood surging through his veins. "I meant like some others who come here."

"From over the ranges," Wilton said rapidly.

"Oh, they are horrible!" she replied, with a shudder.

"Then you—but you are going to——?"

"I am going to what?" she asked archly.

"Why your father said—didn't you hear him?"

"I only heard you talking about Johnson."

"And don't you like the men over the ranges?"

"I hate them!" she exclaimed warmly. "Father brought one here and told me to marry him, and I tried to get over to Mr. Johnson and ask him to stop it, but the squatters turned out after Midnight, when he had killed Doolan, and I haven't heard of him since."

It was dangerous ground for Wilton to encroach upon, but he did not stop to consider.

"If your father brings another will you go to Johnson again?" he asked, looking at her with eyes that would have told her plainly what was in his mind had she glanced at them. But she was looking away into the bush and wondering whether it was a man she had seen pass behind a tree, or only her fancy. She heard Wilton's words and answered, without a moment's hesitation, what was her intention.

"No," she said, "I should come to you first."

Then she looked at him, and her eyes dropped before his.

"For ever?" he asked hoarsely, his features working with the emotion that broke from his control at her words.

She stood silent, her color coming and going, and her frame trembling in a way she could not understand. On her lips the words hovered to answer him in the affirmative, but behind them there was something that held her back. She felt that she would like to throw her arms around him, as she had done with her father earlier in the day, with the knowledge that she would not be repulsed; but again something held her back. She glanced swiftly up into the strong, open, manly face, with a look of mingled love and fear. His eyes, gleaming in their passionate fervor, met hers. He seized her two hands, and, holding them in a close grip, exclaimed,

"You will come to me for ever?"

"You will have to take me," she answered with a smile. "Narli says it is always done; and you can be my champion then."

"I can and I will!" he said warmly.

He drew her towards him, but she started back, and he, nearly losing his balance for the moment, staggered forward. As he did so his ears caught the sound of the report of a rifle, and a bullet struck a post of the veranda beside which he had been standing, and tearing off a splinter, buried itself in the wall of the house. The splinter flew sideways and struck Mary on the head with sufficient force to stun her. He caught her in his arms as she fell and quickly looking over his shoulder, saw the puff of smoke hanging over some low bushes.

He carried Mary into the room where he had rested, and placing her on the stretcher, called aloud for Narli. Then he hastened to where he had left his rifle, and seizing it, crept back to the door and peered cautiously out. There was a tremor in the bushes where he had seen the smoke, and aiming quickly, he fired. He saw a piece of the bush fall, and then another shot echoed from the same direction, and the bullet plowed into the doorway, scarcely six inches from his head.

With a muttered imprecation at his own folly in not having fired his pistol first and reserved his rifle shot for the opportunity which he now had of locating the exact position of his enemy, he retreated behind the door while he reloaded his weapon. In his excitement he had not noticed that there had been no reply from Narli, and the sudden appearance of Mary behind him startled him.

"What is it?" she exclaimed.

"They're attacking us!" he cried. "I warned your father, but he only laughed at me."

"But my head—what is it?" she repeated.

"A bullet struck the veranda and a flying splinter struck your head. Don't show yourself!" he cried as she made as if to go through the doorway. "Look there!" he added, pointing to the mark the bullet had left on the door.

"Oh, you will be hurt!" she exclaimed, clutching at his arm.

He looked into her face, and the anger faded from his eyes.

"Am I not your champion?" he said.

"But give me a rifle, too. I can shoot."

"No, no. You go into safety and let me do the shooting. Your father will hear it and return. There is only one man over there," he added as he rammed his charge home and examined the priming.

Then he knelt down and peered round the edge of the door.

"Don't do that," Mary cried, as she caught him by the shoulder.

"They will shoot you!"

"I must defend you!" he exclaimed.

"But if they rush the house, all the doors are open," she cried. "Come inside, quick!"

"There is only one, I am sure, and he dare not show himself," he answered, loath to shake off the hold she kept on his shoulder.

"But there may be more. Yes, listen! I can hear horses."

He leaned forward, and his ears caught the sound.

"They're coming, they're coming!" Mary cried, clinging to him in her alarm. "Oh, save me from them, save me!"

"They shall never touch you while I live!" he exclaimed, forgetting for the moment the danger he was in as he pressed her to him and kissed her upturned face.

She gazed into her eyes as she clung to him. "At last I know," she said softly. "Now I do not mind what comes."

"Call Narli, and bring all the rifles there are in the house," he exclaimed, coming back from his dream to the reality of the situation. But she did not

seem to hear him as she still clung to him murmuring, "At last, at last I know!"

"Mary, let go! Quick! They're here!" he cried, as he strove to break from her grasp.

As he spoke he heard the gallop of horses outside the door, and throwing his rifle forward, he waited, with his finger on the trigger.

The horses, wildly ridden, were pulled up in their stride opposite the doorway, and Wilton saw Giles, white and excited, leap from the back of one.

"What's all this?" he cried as he dashed into the house and stood looking at Wilton, to whom Mary was still clinging. "Have you gone mad?"

"Come inside before he sees you or you're a dead man!" Wilton replied as, reaching forward, he caught Giles by the arm and pulled him into the house.

"Who sees me! What do you mean?" he exclaimed.

"Midnight. Look at the bullet mark on the door, and there's another on the veranda."

"Nonsense, man, you're mad! Midnight would never dare to attack my house."

"But he has, or one of his gang. The man, whoever he is, fired at me from those bushes, and I believe he's there still."

"Then I'll go and arrest him," Giles cried as he turned to go out again.

"No, father, don't be so rash!" Mary exclaimed as she let go of Wilton and caught hold of Giles. "They'll shoot you if they see you!"

He shook her roughly off. "It's time for action," he said as he sprang into the saddle. Wilton followed, and jumping on to the other horse, they rode to the clump of bushes. Wilton momentarily expected to see a puff of smoke and feel the twinge of a bullet, or see his companion fall; but nothing of the sort occurred. They reached the bushes, and Wilton, pointing to where his bullet had cut the stem, said, "That's where he was when I fired."

They dismounted and searched among the patch of undergrowth, but the only evidence they could find was the impression made where a man had lain at full length immediately behind the bush whose stem had been cut by the bullet from Wilton's rifle.

"You're right; some one's been there, and a near shave he had if he was there when you fired!" Giles exclaimed.

"Now it is time to rouse the country!" Wilton cried.

"I doubt if it's any good now. He'll be fifty miles away before we get out, for he'll think this is getting too hot for him to stay. We should have started yesterday to catch him, only we didn't know he was coming."

"Let us track him now," Wilton said. "We ought to be able to see his footprints on the soft ground, and he must have left a clear track through the bushes."

"Wait till I get my rifle. I don't fancy going after Midnight with empty hands," Giles answered.

He rode away to the house and presently came back with his rifle, Wilton in the mean time searching for some token to point the direction of the bush-ranger's flight. But he was not keen enough to discover the signs which, to

a black fellow's eyes would have been as plain as a high road, in bent twigs and trampled glass blades. Nor was Giles any more successful, and after an hour or so of fruitless search they had to abandon their task and return to the house.

"What's to be done now?" Giles asked as they rode along.

"I think I had better ride over to Johnson's and get as many together as I can, and then come back with them and search the country round, and especially in the ranges where Warrigal said he had his hiding place."

"That means a fortnight's delay for me before I can start after that stock," Giles said in a dissatisfied tone.

"But you could not travel by yourself now with that unscrupulous villain about," Wilton answered.

"I could take care of myself right enough, only I don't like going and leaving the place until I know he is away."

"Then I'll ride straight off and get all I can to come over, and we'll see if he is to be found in the district."

But this expedition was as fruitless as the others had been. Then, Wilton determined to take Johnson into his confidence, and acting on the information given him by Warrigal, the two made their way one night down a narrow pathway to a neighboring cliff which was to lead them they knew not whither.

CHAPTER XV.—AN UGLY SUSPICION.

As the track descended it also widened until they found that they were walking down a ledge some six feet broad. How far from the top of the gully they were they could not even surmise in the dark.

"Let me have a look over the side," Wilton said, and he crept to the edge and looked down. Then he softly whistled for his companion, and Johnson went to him.

"Look there! Isn't that the reflection of a fire?" he asked.

Johnson looked in the direction he indicated and saw a faint glimmer of light showing among the trees below. He watched it for some time without speaking.

"It's a fire all right," he said at length. "I think it is situated on the other side of a spur, seeing how the reflection is cast. The track evidently passes down close to it."

"There's a tree growing pretty near," Wilton said, pointing towards a patch of darker shadow a little farther down the track. "Shall we go on and see if we can climb down it? We may get to the bottom of the gully that way."

"We can try," Johnson answered, and they moved downwards.

The tree, however, was some distance away from the track, but the side was not so steep at that place, and another ledge seemed to shoot out towards it a little distance below.

"We must get down on to that," Johnson said.

"You go on and I'll stay to give you a hand down," Wilton answered.

Johnson carefully lowered himself down on to the second ledge, and, going to the end of it, found that he could easily reach the lower branches of the tree, the trunk of which glimmered through the shadow below.

"Come along," he whispered to Wilton, and in another moment the two stood together.

"We must swing into the tree and slide down the trunk," he continued.

"Go ahead!" Wilton replied briefly, and Johnson caught the nearest branch and clambered up and along until he reached the main stem. There he turned to call to Wilton to follow when his heart stood still, for his eyes could just make out two or three dark figures rapidly moving along the narrow track they had so recently left. Fearful of discovering his hiding place if he made a sound to warn his companion, and trembling lest he should not have noticed or heard the approaching figures, Johnson clung to the tree, pressing himself closely against the trunk, and striving to pierce the gloomy darkness.

The figures came on quickly, moving so silently that he felt convinced they were walking barefoot, but he was too far off to be able to make out more through the darkness than that they were moving rapidly. They passed above the lower ledge upon which he had left Wilton standing, and he breathed more freely, for he felt that they had not seen Wilton or himself. He followed them with his eyes until he could see them no more, and then glanced towards the ledge again.

From out of the deep shadow cast by the bank upon the second ledge he just caught a glimpse of Wilton stepping forward when he heard voices farther down the track. Wilton also heard them, for he sank down into the shadow again and lay close pressed to the wall of rock.

Two figures, walking more slowly and making more noise as they went than the first batch, loomed through the darkness. Their voices were indistinct until they arrived opposite the tree where Johnson was hid. There they stood talking for a few moments.

"I'll go back and take the horses round now," one of them said. "Both of them will be asleep, and the niggers will have spears through them by the time you get up there, so I shall want all my time to get round by the creek."

"It's a poor sort of way to settle old Plover's account," the other answered. "We could easily have brought them down here and made them run for the niggers to have a go at. I'd have burnt the chap that shot Plover."

"Well you can bet the boss has something else in the wind. It'll put the fear of the gang into the rest of them when they find their new leader served the same as Doolan."

"And in the same place, too," the other laughed. "But I'll be hurrying, or the job will be over before I'm there to superintend."

He turned and strode up the track, and the other went down. When the sound of their footsteps had died away, Johnson saw Wilton creep out of the shadow and reach up to the branch. As he scrambled up Johnson slid down the trunk to the ground, where Wilton joined him.

"Did you hear them?" he asked as he landed. "It was you and me they were talking about."

"I suppose it was," Johnson answered. "And I suppose, too, that the man who passed us was the boss."

"Midnight!" Wilton exclaimed. "And we did not shoot him!"

"Just as well, I think, for we should have had the whole gang on our heels directly after. But it's lucky we're here and not camping up above. They mean business all right."

"We are not out of it yet, though. What are we to do now we are here?"

"I fancy we had better wait where we are for a time. From what that chap said about the horses, I believe there will be a move down below before long. They may be all off, and then we can travel more comfortably."

"We might try and get a little nearer that fire. If we keep under the shadow we may be able to see who they are."

It was a risky proceeding, but they managed to make fair progress, until the gleam of the fire showed more distinctly and they could catch sight of the smoke as it slowly rose and curled along the broken rock.

"It looks very much like a cave to me," Johnson whispered.

"If we could get up there we might be able to look down on them," Wilton answered, indicating a point which stood forward above the gleam.

"We'll try," Johnson whispered.

They decided to climb up first and try to reach the track which they believed was between them and their goal. It was a terribly hard climb in the darkness, and with the necessity for absolute quiet, but they managed it, and struck the track just where it curved in its downward path. On the other side of the curve they found the rock more broken, and were able to squeeze and crawl along, helping each other and themselves as best they could, until they reached a point directly above the smoke. As well as they could make out, they were on a rough ledge which jutted out from the main wall of rock and rose along its edge into an irregular parapet on which there was a thick growth of rank herbage. But the climb they had managed had tried their strength so much that for some minutes they could only lie panting at the back of the parapet.

When he had managed to get his breath again, Johnson whispered,

"If we're found here it will be a case of fight to the last."

"The odds are in our favor. The situation will enable us to withstand their attack," Wilton replied.

"All the same we shall have to take care what we are doing. A false step and it is all up."

"I don't hear anything," Wilton said after a few minutes' silence.

"We must creep to the edge and look over," Johnson answered.

They wriggled nearer to the edge, and peering through the tangled vegetation which grew along it, they saw below them what was evidently the mouth of a fairly large cave. A fire was burning slowly in front of it, and beyond that some saddles and rifles were thrown in a heap. The bush grew to within a few yards of the opening, and, as they looked, a man appeared leading two

horses, which he proceeded to saddle. When he had completed that he moved towards the cave, pausing as he passed the fire to kick the logs closer together, with the result that a brighter flame shot up.

"That's enough. We don't want the bush afire," a surly voice said from the interior of the cave.

He answered with an imprecation and continued his way into the cave.

Wilton, forgetful for the moment of his position, was anxious to see where the man went, and, as he passed under the rock, craned his neck forward. But he was still too far back to get a view of the cave, and he leaned his hand on the edge of the ledge in order to give himself a better position. His weight told on the half decomposed stone, and the part where his hand rested gave way and fell with a loud clatter, his arm at the same time slipping down.

The man who had brought up the horses rushed out and looked up as Johnson pulled Wilton back.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, looking straight up to where the two men were cowering.

A harsh laugh came from the cave and a well known voice exclaimed,

"You're a brave chap to be scared of a wallaby!"

"Great kingdom!" Johnson exclaimed, and he clutched Wilton by the arm as in a vise when he heard the familiar tones.

"Now who is Midnight?" Wilton whispered hoarsely.

"Douglas, as I'm a living being!" Johnson gasped, naming a man who had gone with them on their last expedition, and of whom Giles had always been suspicious.

"Whist!" Wilton whispered as the sounds of angry voices came up from below. They bent their heads towards the edge again and listened.

"Go on with the horses or you'll miss your mates," they heard Douglas say.

"Clear out sharp and don't stand there like an owl," the surly voice they had first heard said.

The man they had seen came from under the shadow of the rock, swearing loudly. He walked to the horses, and mounting one, rode off into the bush leading the other. The murmur of voices came from the cave, but not distinctly enough for the listeners to hear the words. They lay with their heads on the ledge until the sounds ceased and the fire grew dull. Then Johnson whispered to Wilton that they had better be off.

"Up or down?" Wilton asked.

"We'll take the track and trust to luck," Johnson replied.

"Is it not risky?" Wilton said.

"I hope it is. I could put up with anything now," Johnson replied in a bitter tone.

They crept cautiously down and on to the ledge, along which they went as rapidly as they could, hearing nothing and meeting nothing until they arrived at the fallen tree. There was a faint gray coming into the eastern sky when they reached the top.

"Shall we look for the passage?" Wilton asked.

"Better climb over the top," Johnson answered as he clambered up.

But Wilton preferred to try the way the man had gone who had passed them, and he crept into the hole that showed black under the rock. He discovered that by going on his hands and knees he could creep through the narrow passage, and emerged behind the roots of the tree which had evidently been blown over in some storm. He climbed on to the trunk and rejoined Johnson.

"We know their secret now!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, and it's the bitterest thing I ever learned, too," Johnson answered.

"You mean about Douglas?"

"I do. I've known that man for years, and I would as soon have trusted him as myself, and yet here he is in the middle of his gang!"

"It will be great news for Giles!"

"For heaven's sake don't tell him! At least, not yet. He would crow over us, and me in particular, for the rest of his life. No, we must keep this to ourselves, Wilton."

But they had no chance to tell Giles, as on their return to Billah, Mary announced that her father had gone to Sydney. Wilton went on to Toombul with Johnson, and here Warrigal turned up again, with the information that he could now guide them to Midnight's special hiding place.

"But supposing it is only the cave that we discovered?" Johnson suggested.

"It is not. I told him about that, and he said that was the place where the gang met, but that Midnight's was away from it."

CHAPTER XVI.—FACE TO FACE.

THEY carefully loaded their rifles, and, mounting their horses, rode slowly after the black fellow. He walked along silently and rapidly, leading them through the bush without a pause, until they found that they were nearing broken country, and at the same time the daylight began to fade.

"We shall have to go on foot," Johnson said. "We cannot ride in the dark in this rough region."

"We can keep alongside him easier, too," Wilton answered.

They called to Warrigal to stop, and explained their intention.

"By and by you leave it horses in gully," he replied.

"But where is the gully?" Johnson asked. "It will be dark almost immediately."

"Just over there," Warrigal said, pointing. "Plenty light till then."

"Hurry along then, if it is to be done," Wilton said, and Warrigal started off again at a more rapid rate.

There was just light enough to see what they were doing when he led them into a narrow, blind gully, which turned out of a larger one, its entrance being almost obscured by a clump of thickly growing mimosa.

"It's a grand spot to leave the horses," Johnson observed, "or, for the matter of that, to camp here ourselves."

"How far now to the cave?" Wilton asked.

The black, standing near them, raised his hand.

"You keep plenty quiet, my word. Midnight all round."

"This would not be a bad place for him," Johnson said.

"You get it rifle ready?" Warrigal asked.

"Both ready," Wilton answered.

"By and by we go along, quiet. No speak. Plenty soon find it cave. Sit down and wait sun come up. Midnight wake up. Come out. Bang, bang. Midnight he fall down dead." He accompanied his brief, disjointed oration with expressive gestures and danced round the two at his concluding words.

"You've arranged it all," Johnson said with a hearty laugh.

"When you shoot it you aim there," Warrigal exclaimed, placing his hand in front of his eyes.

"He's always telling me that," Wilton said.

"There may be something in it," Johnson answered. "In the mean time we may as well arrange our plans, in case things should turn out as he says, because it will be no use trying to discuss them when we are alongside the cave."

"We might challenge him to surrender if, as Warrigal says, he comes out when the sun gets up."

"One will have to do that, and the other will have to rest under shelter and cover him. He is bound to make an attempt to escape, and then—well, the one under shelter must fire."

It was the best plan they could think of, and agreeing that Wilton should challenge him and Johnson stay out of sight, they explained their scheme to the black. He could not understand why they should not fire directly they saw their man, whether he was asleep or awake, moving or standing, and the idea of capturing him alive was quite out of the question in his opinion.

"Well, we will try it, anyhow," Johnson said. "Now we will start for the cave."

Warrigal led the way from the gully and up the steep bank of the larger one, the two white men following close upon his heels. At the top of the bank he stopped and bent down to the ground.

"Plenty quiet," he whispered, and resumed his walk, going very slowly and carefully down the gully which lay on the other side of the rise they had just climbed.

They soon found that they were walking down a narrow, well defined path-way, which turned and twisted round boulders and trees until it was impossible for either of them to say in which direction they were traveling. The night was very dark, and as they descended lower they had to walk hand in hand, Warrigal leading, with Johnson in the rear and Wilton in the center.

Then the ground became level, and they went along straight for some distance through what appeared to be thick bush, judging by the even greater darkness. Suddenly Warrigal stopped again and lifted Wilton's arm until it pointed.

"Him sleep there," he whispered.

Wilton turned to Johnson and repeated the information.

"But where are we? It is as dark as a pit," Johnson whispered.

"By and by sun come up," the black answered when they asked him.

"And I suppose we can sit down and wait."

"Plenty quiet," Warrigal replied.

They sat down with their rifles on their knees as the only thing to be done until enough light should come for them to see where they were and what they were doing. The place was wonderfully still and quiet.

"I wonder where we are. Is it near the big cave?" Johnson said in a very soft whisper.

A gentle rustle of some leaves checked him, and for the remainder of the night they sat still and silent. At last the sky directly overhead began to grow a little less dark and the forms of the trees to stand out from the prevailing shadow, and they knew that dawn was at hand. They glanced round for their guide, but he had disappeared in the darkness. They were in a place that was apparently entirely surrounded by vegetation, thick and impenetrable. In front of them there was a low boulder, standing close to a vine covered face of rock, and round it a narrow track curved.

"Are we trapped?" Johnson said as soon as they could make out their surroundings.

"No; I believe in Warrigal," Wilton answered.

"But where is he?" Johnson asked.

A rustle sounded from somewhere among the trees, and Wilton held up his hand.

"Quick, be ready!" he whispered. "I will stand there," he went on, indicating the shelter of the boulder. "He may come along that path. You hide——"

Before he could finish a footstep sounded distinctly on the pathway, and Wilton sprang forward with his rifle ready as round the boulder the unmistakable form of Midnight appeared.

He stopped in his stride as he caught sight of Wilton, and for a moment the two men stood watching each other.

With a quick movement, Wilton raised his rifle to his shoulder, and, covering the outlaw, cried out, "Surrender or you're a dead man."

Midnight's lips parted in a loud laugh as he drew a pistol from his coat pocket and took deliberate aim at his opponent.

Wilton heard a report almost beside his ear, and, at the same moment, his finger pressed the trigger.

"Load! Quick! Load!" Johnson cried behind him, and both hastily began to recharge their rifles while yet the smoke from the two shots hung between them and Midnight. As it slowly dispersed they saw the man still standing with leveled pistol. But at the same instant that they could see him, he was also able to see them, and the flash and report of the pistol told Johnson that advantage had been taken of the opportunity to reply to their shots. Wilton, engrossed in the reloading of his rifle, had not looked up, and he uttered a sharp cry as he felt a numbing twinge in his chest and staggered back under the force of the blow.

The cry following upon the shot aroused Johnson to the danger of his

own position while he stood where he was and acted as a target for Midnight. Clubbing his rifle, he sprang forward through the smoke towards the spot where the outlaw had been a moment before; but when he dashed through the thin cloud, he found that Midnight had fled. He plunged through the undergrowth and round the boulder from behind which Midnight had appeared, and glanced keenly and quickly around, but without seeing anything save bushes and rock. He was for the moment nonplussed, and paused, hesitating whether to proceed or return to Wilton; then he heard the sound of a shout from down the gully, and Wilton's voice calling him.

"It's Warrigal," Wilton exclaimed, as he reappeared. "Load your rifle and mine. There's treachery in this."

"You are badly hurt," Johnson cried as he caught sight of Wilton lying on his side with a blanched face and a red stain spreading over the front of his shirt.

"Never mind now. Quick and load," Wilton gasped, as the shout came again from down the gully, nearer and more distinct than it had been before.

Johnson rapidly completed the operation of loading both rifles and then turned to his friend.

"Let me help you under cover," he said. "It is no use waiting in the open for those brutes to pot at you."

He stooped over Wilton and raised him to his feet; but the exertion was too much for the wounded man and he stumbled forward, slipped from his comrade's arms, and fell heavily to the ground. The sound of some one crashing through the undergrowth behind him caused Johnson to turn just as Warrigal and Douglas leaped out on to the open patch where he was standing. He made a dash at his rifle, and, seizing it, aimed at Douglas as he cried,

"Stand off or I fire!"

Douglas stopped and looked at him steadily.

"Fire if you like, Johnson; though it would be a poor testimony of your friendship to kill me at the moment of my escape."

Warrigal had slipped past Johnson as he challenged Douglas and knelt down by the side of Wilton, calling upon him, in his broken English, to speak and say he was not dead.

"Your escape?" Johnson exclaimed.

"Certainly; my escape from the gang that captured me the day we were out. That black fellow there did the trick for me an hour or so since, and told me you two were waiting to shoot Midnight——"

"But—but you are Midnight. We heard you in the cave. It is no use hiding it now," Johnson interrupted savagely.

Douglas threw down the rifle he was carrying and held out his arms.

"If I am Midnight, then shoot me where I stand," he cried.

"Baal it Midnight; baal it Midnight; that pfeller, no, no," Johnson heard as Warrigal sprang in front of him. "Poor Massa Melelee, 'im dead, sure."

"Shoot me if you don't believe me, Johnson, and then look after Wilton," Douglas said quietly.

"I believe you," Johnson answered slowly. "But——"

"Never mind the rest. I'll explain after. Wilton needs all our attention now," Douglas rejoined.

At the first glance it looked as if Wilton was beyond the reach of their attentions, for he lay bleeding copiously from a wound in his chest and apparently lifeless. With such means as they could devise they stanching the bleeding and bound up the wound.

"We must get him away from here sharp, or it will be all up with him," Douglas said, as they proceeded with the bandaging.

"But how are we to move him?" Johnson asked.

"There was only one man in the cave where they hid me, and the black fellow settled him; but there are a couple of horses and some blankets. Send the black fellow for them and we will make a sling to carry Wilton if he cannot sit a horse," Douglas replied.

Warrigal, as soon as the suggestion was made to him, supplemented the scheme. Behind the boulder, he said, was a small cave which Midnight used as a secret hiding place and which was only known to one or two of the gang. He was for carrying Wilton there before starting for the horses.

"I did not see it when I was behind the boulder just now," Johnson remarked.

"Suppose you come now," Warrigal exclaimed.

"Look at it, Johnson, while I stay with Wilton," Douglas added.

"He may be hiding there," Johnson excitedly whispered. "We fired at him and when the smoke cleared he stood there," and he pointed to the spot. "He held a pistol in his hand and shot Wilton, when I jumped for him; but when I got through the smoke, he had disappeared."

Douglas looked up from the knot he was tying in the strip of flannel which did duty for a bandage.

"Why did you not say that before?" he said. "Get your rifle. We'll both go."

They whispered their suspicions to Warrigal.

"My word; yes, yes; plenty like it," the black fellow answered as he stepped lightly towards the boulder, closely followed by the two men with their rifles ready.

Warrigal crept stealthily round it and stopped, listening intently. Then he pointed, and, following the direction, Johnson saw a vine straggling over a ledge in the rock. The black fellow, pressing himself against the boulder, stole silently along until he was almost beside the trailing tendrils of the vine. He peered cautiously around and then rose to his feet with a chuckling laugh and pushed the vine on one side, revealing the narrow entrance to a small cave. He turned towards the two with a laugh on his face when a shot echoed from high on the other side of the gully, and Warrigal fell to the ground.

Douglas sprang forward and looked upwards. The wreath of smoke floated calmly among the rocks and the vegetation on the top of the bank, but there was nothing else to indicate the whereabouts of the man who had fired the shot.

"Look out!" Johnson cried. "Keep under cover."

"We'll have to get out of this as fast as we can, or we shall all be picked off like that," Douglas exclaimed as he rejoined his companion and glanced at Warrigal, who lay where he fell with a bullet wound showing in his head.

"But what about Wilton? He's not dead, and we cannot leave him," Johnson said.

"We must carry him," Douglas answered. "One carry him while the other keeps a lookout. The black's as dead as a doornail."

They stepped back to Wilton. He had come to again and was leaning upon one arm and glancing vacantly from side to side.

"Try to hang on to my back," Johnson said to him. "Here's Douglas. We were mistaken about him, but there's no time to talk now. Pull yourself together, if you can, till we get you out of this."

Wilton's head was swimming and his mind was mazy and confused, as he felt himself being hoisted up on Johnson's back. He held on as well as he could, not quite understanding why, and only dimly realizing that he was being carried somewhere, wondering now and again why he was taken over the roughest ground while there was a good open space near at hand. Then he noticed that the place was steep and evidently hard to climb, until at last he sank to the ground once more and went away into darkness just as he heard some one say, "Thank God, we're at the top."

CHAPTER XVII.—TERRIBLE NEWS.

WHEN Wilton was again able to look around him and intelligently understand what he was looking at, he found himself lying on a stretcher bed inside a fire lit room, while in front of the fire two men sat, with their backs towards him, smoking and conversing in a low tone.

"Johnson," he said, fancying that he recognized the voice of one of the speakers; but the sound of his own voice, coming weak and thin, and the effort it cost him to speak at all, surprised him so much that when he saw one of the men turn and reveal the face of Douglas instead of that of Johnson, it seemed quite in keeping with the other incongruities of his mind.

The man rose and came over to him, Wilton watching him with wondering eyes. There was no doubt but that it was Douglas, the dim, uncertain mind told itself, slowly trying to grasp why it should question the reality.

"Are you awake again, old fellow?" Douglas asked, bending over him.

"Yes. Have I been asleep? There's a—where is this?" Wilton answered disjointedly.

"This is Toombul. You're not too well, so don't worry, but take things easy for a day or two. Johnson's in the next room having a camp. He's been with you all day, so Dick the stockman and I are taking our spell."

"What's wrong?" Wilton asked feebly. "I feel all played out, and there is something——"

Dick had also risen from his seat by the fire and had come over to Douglas, carrying in his hand a pannikin he had taken from beside the fire. "A drop might do him good," he whispered.

"Take a pull at this," Douglas said, as he interrupted Wilton to offer him the pannikin. "Dick made it. He boiled down almost a bullock into a half gallon of water, and says it will put you right in two days if you'll drink it."

The two men raised him up and he drank the warm liquid that was in the pannikin.

"It'll make a man of him in a week," Dick whispered to Douglas, as Wilton lay back, feeling refreshed and revived by the draft. "Just do a bit of a sleep, Mr. Wilton, and you'll buck into shape in an hour," Dick added to the sick man, who, tacitly accepting everything he was told, closed his eyes and drifted into slumber.

When next he awakened he found that it was daylight, and his body felt more of the vigor of life than it had done the night before. He glanced towards the fireplace and saw Johnson standing there and looking at him.

"I dropped the lid of the billy. I was afraid it would disturb you," he said, as he came over to Wilton. "How do you feel now? They told me you came round in the night. Don't move," he added quickly, as Wilton made as if to rise.

"What is it? I cannot get the hang of things at all," Wilton said irritably. "Was Douglas here? I thought I saw him."

"Just keep quiet and you're all right," Johnson answered. "You had a bit of a twister a week or so since, but I reckon you're well over it now. Have some more of Dick's stew; he swears it is what has saved you."

"It's good stuff," Wilton said; "but tell me all about this affair. I feel played out, and what is all this on my chest?"

"You take things easy for a day or so longer and trust to us to look after you. Then when you can get up, we'll go over the yarn again," Johnson replied.

He was as good as his word, and all that Wilton could get out of him was the praise of Dick's stew, which he insisted was the only thing that saved Wilton, and enabled him a few days later to get about again. Then Johnson told him all the story of the adventure in the gully, and made the confused memory clear.

"We were wrong in both firing at once," Johnson said as they sat and talked the matter over.

"It is the last thing I clearly remember," Wilton answered. "After that I am all confusion. Tell me exactly what took place."

"Well, Midnight had you covered with his pistol and fired at you as soon as the smoke from our shots cleared away. You fell and I jumped for him, but he had gone before I could reach him. You called me back as you heard Warrigal coming and feared treachery, but there was no treachery about poor Warrigal. He had found Douglas chained in a cave down the gully where we heard him that night, and had let him free after knocking the one member of the gang who was there on the head. Douglas can tell you his yarn himself; he will be back here tomorrow night. All that I can say is that Warrigal set him free and brought him along to help us. But when he appeared I thought he was Midnight and came near shooting him before I

realized my mistake. As it was, we turned our attention to you, and while doing so, that cold blooded fiend Midnight picked off poor Warrigal with a rifle shot fired from up the gully. Douglas and I saw that it was no use staying where we were, unless we also wanted to be picked off, so we started for home."

"But how did I get here?" Wilton asked.

"Oh, you came along all right," Johnson answered.

"Yes, but how?" Wilton persisted.

"We hauled you up the gully," Johnson answered. "It was easy work after that."

The memory of being lifted up and carried slowly and laboriously, and of the voice exclaiming, "Thank God, we're at the top," come to Wilton, and reaching out his hand he gripped that of his companion. He wanted to say something, but the words stuck in his throat and he could only gaze at the fire and pull hard at his pipe, and for some minutes the two men sat in silence. Wilton reviling himself because he could not express all the gratitude he felt to the man who had saved his life, and Johnson blaming himself for having owned up to it. "He would have done the same for me," he mused. "I need not have made a song about it."

The silence continued until it became oppressive to each of the simple hearted, plucky Britons, who shrank instinctively from anything approaching a scene. Then Johnson reached down for the pannikin that stood near the fire.

"Have some more of Dick's stew," he said, as he handed the pannikin to Wilton.

"It's good stuff," the latter answered as he took it.

"Yes; it's what saved your life," Johnson replied.

The following evening saw Douglas again at Toombul. Johnson had not explained that he had ridden over to Billah to let Mary know what had befallen Wilton now that he seemed to be recovering, but had said he had gone away for a day or so in case his presence worried Wilton during his early convalescence.

"Why should it?" Wilton asked when Johnson told him.

"Well, you were a bit queer in the head once or twice, and you raved about Midnight and Douglas being one, as we thought, you know." He might have added that it was his own idea that if Mary would come over, her presence might do more for Wilton than anything else. Expecting to see her, he wondered when Douglas did not return as early as he should have done. He wondered more when he saw Douglas ride up alone and with a terribly hard set face.

"Where's Wilton?" he exclaimed quickly.

"Over at the house. Where's the girl?"

"Billah's in ashes," Douglas answered, "and Giles has gone with it."

"You don't mean it!" Johnson cried.

"And I found this," Douglas went on, producing a white handkerchief on which there had been stained in red the words, "Account settled, Midnight."

Johnson looked at it blankly, his thoughts reverting at once to his friend.

"We can't tell him," he said quickly.

"Not yet," Douglas answered.

"Luckily I didn't breathe a word to him where you had gone," Johnson went on.

"I had a look round for tracks," Douglas interrupted. "They followed their usual mode, attacking from all sides and riding off in different directions, and then crossing and recrossing each other's trails. We'll have to raise the country over this."

"But what has become of the girl?" Johnson asked.

Wilton, hearing the voices had come to the door of the house, and Douglas caught sight of him. "Don't talk about it now; there he is," he said, as he got out of his saddle and walked up to the house.

"My word, you're looking yourself again already," he said as he went up to Wilton. "In a week from now you'll be all right."

"Thanks to you and Johnson, and——"

"Dick's stew? Yes, that's the joker," Johnson called out, interrupting him.

"You came along the Billah road, didn't you?" Wilton said, turning to Douglas. "Did you see——"

"By the way, Douglas, Wilton is very anxious to hear your yarn," Johnson interrupted quickly. "I didn't care to tell it for you, seeing you would be back today."

"There's not much to tell," Douglas began, while Johnson slipped behind Wilton and shook his head vigorously. "But I can give it to you when—hullo, what's this?" he broke off suddenly, as he caught sight of a black fellow passing the window.

The next moment a stalwart aboriginal, streaked with ochre and holding a war spear in his hand, entered the room and stood just inside the doorway.

"Hullo, my hearty, what name belonga you," Johnson cried, springing to his feet.

"Meleelee man! Toombul man! Billah man no good!" the black said. "Gib it tucker; plenty black fellow want it tucker," he went on, waving his hand towards the outside of the house. "Me show it Billah girl; plenty flood; my word."

Douglas and Johnson looked at each other while Wilton cried out as he stepped towards the black, "Quick! What is it?"

"Billah big fire; Billah girl say, 'Quick, tell Meleelee man; flood come down, me plenty dead soon.'"

"Billah burnt! Mary—flood—dead!" Wilton gasped. "Oh, my God!" he cried as he staggered back.

"Hold up, man—hold up," Johnson cried as he caught him. "You talk their lingo, Douglas; ask him what he means."

Douglas made free with what food was on the table, and, taking the black fellow outside, shouted to Dick to give him enough to feed himself and

his companions. Then he hastened back to the room, where he found Wilton lying full length on the floor and Johnson trying to force some rum between his lips.

CHAPTER XVIII.—A RACE FOR RESCUE.

FOR a long time Wilton remained unconscious, for so long, indeed, that his two comrades began to despair of his ever coming round.

"Get him on to the bed," Douglas said, as soon as he rejoined Johnson, and together they lifted him and carried him over to the bed where they had placed him when they carried him home from the gully.

"What about the girl?" Johnson asked.

"The blackfellow says she and the old gin have been taken captive by the blacks, and are in a humpy the gang have up Moggill Creek. There's a big fresh coming down from the ranges and they expect a flood, so we had better hurry as fast as we can. There were only two men in charge, the black said."

"But we cannot leave Wilton like this."

"No, one of us will have to stay—unless he comes out of this fit—when we can tell him we are going to the rescue, and leave him in Dick's hands."

It was a good suggestion, Johnson thought, and the two agreed to carry it out and start for Moggill Creek directly they found Wilton was able to understand what they were doing. But when he did recover his senses again and heard the full story the blackfellow had to tell, he also wanted to go to the rescue.

"You cannot stand it," Johnson told him. "It will be a rough trip in the dark, and we may have to swim our horses over. You are not strong enough for that yet."

Douglas joined his voice in trying to persuade Wilton from any such intention as he had expressed.

"When we get back we shall all start for Sydney at once, and you will want what strength you have for that journey. Don't delay us now."

Wilton lay back, weak and anxious. He wanted to go, but felt the force of his friends' words.

"All right," he said, "but don't lose time."

The blacks gave a minute description of the situation of the humpy, and also of the shortest route to follow to reach it; but nothing could induce them to retrace their steps that night. The next day they would go, but not before.

It was no use arguing with them, so handing Wilton over to Dick, Johnson and Douglas saddled their own horses, and leading two others, they set out, fully armed and equipped with everything they thought might be wanted.

The night was moonless, but they were able to follow the Billah road as far as the place where the house had stood. Then they turned off into the bush and rode more slowly in the direction the blacks had indicated. The route was rough and difficult, but the necessity of haste urged them forward,

and they kept their panting horses at it until they heard a dull roar in the distance.

The meaning was clear to each of them, and neither spoke ; they only sat the tighter in their saddles, and urged their horses into a quicker pace, till the sound of the rushing waters was distinct and near at hand.

"We have struck the bluff they said was opposite the humpy," Douglas said shortly, as he stopped his horse and dismounted.

Johnson followed his example, and, securing the animals, they advanced cautiously on foot.

The roar sounded louder in their ears, and dimly through the dark of the night they saw, below them, a wide stretch of rushing water. As they stood, each man straining his eyes to penetrate further through the gloom, neither spoke, although the same thought was in each one's mind. Gradually they made out the dark shadow of standing trees somewhere in the middle of the expanse ; but the trees were not very high above the surface, and certainly no humpy was ever built whose roof would reach to where the water swept past the trees.

Still the two men stood watching in silence, each one hoping that the other would be able to make out something he could not himself see, but which would give the lie direct to the growing conviction in his mind. Then, with one impulse, each stretched out his hand and grasped his comrade by the arm.

From across the waste of swirling flood there came another sound besides the roar and rush, and the hearts of the two men stood still as they heard the faint, muffled shrieks of women come from across the stream. Then the shrieks became louder, and they heard the words, "Help ! Help !"

"Thank God !" Douglas exclaimed, and placing his hand to his mouth, he gave a loud, long coo-ee.

The cries ceased, and a shrill coo-ee answered his.

"Where are you ?" he shouted as loudly as he could, and the one word "roof" was all that they could hear of the answer.

"Can you hold on ?" he shouted again.

The roar of the flood smothered the words that were sent in reply.

"Not long," Douglas shouted, "not long ;" and as if it were an echo from the other side, came back the words "not long."

Then he turned to Johnson.

"It's a swim," he said.

"There's no other chance," Johnson replied.

"Shall we go together ?"

"Better go singly. If the first goes under——"

"Just so," Douglas interrupted. "I'll try first."

Without further words, they set about making arrangements for the attempt which might result in the rescue of the two women, or the drowning of the two men. Taking with him a coil of light rope, Douglas suggested entering the stream higher up.

"I can go with the current and strike across for the trees," he said quietly.

"Build up a big fire on the bluff here, and it will guide me."

He held out his hand, and Johnson grasped it.

"Good luck," he said, and Douglas strode rapidly away.

Johnson piled up all the dry wood he could find upon the fire, and peered anxiously towards the dark line half way across the flood. The minutes dragged until it seemed that hours had passed since his comrade went away. He listened for any sound which would tell him that the two women were still living, or that Douglas was safe; but nothing came to him save the crackling of the fire and the roaring of the water. He stood up and uttered a long coo-ee. Then he heard two voices, high and shrill, answer him across the flood, and another from up the stream.

"Help is coming!" he shouted, and dimly heard, but could not understand, the answer from the humpy.

When he left Johnson, Douglas walked as rapidly as he could along the bank, until he came to a spot opposite and in a line with the trees among which the humpy stood. The light of the fire showed distinctly across the water, and he saw that the stream was narrower where he was and flowing with a tremendous current. Stripping off his boots and coat, he tied the length of rope round his waist. Then he plunged in, striking out with all his strength diagonally across the river, the current carrying him along with fearful velocity. Around him the water bubbled and boiled, and logs floating with the current threatened a greater danger than the flood. But he was a strong, able swimmer, and he was well in the center of the stream when he saw the clump of trees immediately before him. The rush of water, as it approached the obstacle to its course, divided, and the hardest part of his task was to prevent himself being carried out again. He was spun round in the eddies and almost dragged under as he neared the trees; then he seemed for a moment to have got into still water, and in another second he was clinging, breathless and well nigh exhausted, to the branches of a standing tree.

The force of the current was no longer so tremendous, and as soon as he had recovered his breath he struck out slowly and swam gently from tree to tree until he saw the shadow of the humpy roof loom ahead of him. A few more strokes and he was alongside of it, and, grasping a projecting sapling, he clambered on to it and upon the sloping bark.

"Where are you?" he gasped, fearful as he heard no one that he was too late.

"Mr. Douglas!" Mary exclaimed as she recognized his voice.

"Yes," he panted.

"Oh, Narli, we are saved!" she cried.

He struggled and clambered to the side where the two were clinging. Then he shouted out the words that told Johnson the fight was won so far.

CHAPTER XIX.—COURAGE WINS.

It was evident that nothing more could be done until morning, and Douglas shouted over to Johnson that they were quite safe until the dawn. He kept the fire blazing, and the gleam of it was some small comfort to the three who were clinging to the humpy roof. Otherwise they had but little to cheer

them during the next two hours. Then the day broke and revealed to them the fact that the water had touched its highest point and was rapidly falling.

To Douglas the appearance of the sun was doubly welcome, as it overcame the coldness he had experienced from his saturated clothing.

"The humpy will be out of the water in six hours," he said encouragingly.

"If we could only have a fire," Mary answered, as she shivered.

"And something to eat," Douglas added. "Can you swim?" he asked suddenly.

"A little," Mary replied. "Narli taught me."

"There's a way to get out of this, if you care to try it," he said. "It's a bit risky, but we shall have to wait for hours before we can get the horses over."

"There is a ford lower down, I think," she answered. "It was the way we came, as far as Narli and I can remember."

"But the stream is too strong for it to be passable for hours yet," he said.

"If we could get some of this bark off we could fix up floats."

"And swim over? Through that current?" Mary asked, pointing to where the stream was visible through the trees.

"It's better than waiting," he answered.

"No good," Narli exclaimed. "By um by flood all gone."

"It will take a long time going," Douglas said.

"No, no," Narli persisted. "Soon flood all gone; look!"

She pointed to the nearest tree stem, the flood mark on which was already some two feet above the water. Douglas remained sceptical, but in half the time that he had given for the water to leave the humpy, they were able to climb down through the hole the women had made when they effected their escape on to the roof.

Narli hunted round until she found some of the small parcels of flour she had tied up in pieces of blanket. The water had soaked through the covering and had saturated the flour on the outside, but inside it was dry and there was enough in each parcel to serve for bread.

It was quickly kneaded and made into hasty cakes, and with appetites keen edged by their fasting vigil of the night before the three devoured them as soon as they were cooked. Refreshed and reinvigorated by the meal, Douglas went outside the hut and found that the water was receding rapidly and that already sufficient ground had become exposed for him to walk within easy hailing distance of Johnson.

He called out that there was a ford lower down, and Johnson replied that he would ride along the bank of the stream and see whether he could get the horses over.

A mile or so below the humpy he found that the stream spread out and was comparatively shallow to what it was in the more confined course above. The water was still flowing at a great rate and he decided to wait an hour or so before attempting to get over. After a couple of hours he decided to make the attempt.

He drove the horses in as high up as possible. The water reached to the

girths of the one he was riding until about the center of the stream, when it deepened until the horse was carried off its legs. The three others, which were in front, swam for the opposite shore, and were again on their feet twenty yards further ahead, and from there until they reached dry ground they were only up to their knees.

Turning them up the stream he drove them at a smart gallop until he arrived opposite the humpy. There was still a fair sized creek running where the track of sand had been before the flood, but he again put the horses into it and managed to get them over to the rise, now an island, on which the humpy stood. A few minutes later and he rode up and exchanged warm greetings with the three who were awaiting him.

"We had better not waste time here," Douglas said when they had each told of their experiences. "Now that the flood has gone down the gang may come back to look for their prisoners."

"Yes, we had better get over to the other side and have a rest and a feed there," Johnson assented.

Mary and Narli were even more anxious to leave the place, and, ignoring the wet state of the saddles, they all mounted and set off. They succeeded in getting over the small creek easily and rode quickly for the ford, Mary's spirits rising higher than they had been for many days.

As they approached Toombul, Johnson galloped on ahead. When he came in sight of the station, he saw Wilton on the veranda and waved his hat to him.

"Where's Douglas?" Wilton cried, as he rode up.

"Coming along with the others," Johnson answered, as he sprang from his horse.

"The others? Then you have——"

"We found them safe enough," Johnson replied, as Wilton grasped his hand and once more failed to put his thoughts into words. "I came on ahead to fix things up a bit," he added quietly, and not until long after did Wilton learn all that was implied in the simple expression, "We found them safe enough."

Shortly the three came in sight, and Wilton hurried to meet them. Mary slipped from her horse, and, heedless of all else, Wilton clasped her in his arms.

"My love, my love," he said, as she clung to him, sobbing.

"Oh, that cruel Midnight," she moaned. "He killed father, and nearly killed you."

"But I am all right now," he whispered, "and we will go away to Sydney and get police and have that scoundrel hanged yet."

"Oh, it has been awful," she moaned. "I would have killed myself, only Narli stopped me."

"And that would have killed me," he answered.

"Just before Mr. Douglas came——" she began, and then, looking round, broke off. "Where is he?" she exclaimed, for Douglas had continued on his way with Narli and Mary's horse, and the two were standing by themselves.

"I forgot them," Wilton confessed. "They have gone into the house."

He linked his arm in hers, and they walked together to the station. At the door Johnson met them.

"We have tea ready," he said in an unconcerned tone.

CHAPTER XX.—THE MIST'S RISE.

IN spite of the heavy strain on the endurance of Douglas and Johnson, it was late at night before the three men went to sleep. Mary and Narli went to their room soon after the meal was over, and then the three sat round the table smoking and debating what was the next thing to be done.

The last escapade of the gaug showed them that something more would have to be done to rid the country of the pest than the desultory campaigns of the squatters had been able to accomplish.

"The government must help us, or we shall all be wiped out," Douglas said forcibly. "Now that Giles has been killed, and his station burned to the ground, perhaps we shall be able to get some police to scour the district."

"It's the only remedy," Johnson assented. "We shall have to go to Sydney."

"That's it," Douglas exclaimed, "you and Wilton start off with the others as soon as they are rested enough, and I'll stay on here and call all the fellows round. You can set me right, too, while you are down there," he added grimly.

"There's not much fear about that," Wilton answered.

"Then we'll consider that settled," Douglas interrupted. "You four start off as soon as you're ready. If you want any support down below, tell them every squatter in the place will come, and we won't do a hand's turn if this gang is not wiped out."

They agreed to the proposal, and in the morning Wilton told Mary. She wanted to start the same day, but Douglas and Johnson both urged for a couple of days' rest before the journey was begun. In the mean time the party of black fellows was sent round to the different stations with messages signed by Johnson, Douglas, and Wilton, calling them to meet at Toombul as soon as they could, and telling them of the destruction of Billah. Another message was also given to the blacks for their own tribe, and it was that they could always have rations and blankets for the asking at either Meleelee or Toombul as a recognition of what they had done in the rescue of Mary.

Two days later, Wilton and Johnson, accompanied by Mary and Narli, started for Sydney, and traveled in easy stages down to the coast. In the early part of the journey they made their own camp at night, but when they came into more settled country, they could always reach a homestead before dark.

To the girl, whose whole life had been spent away in the back blocks, the time occupied in that journey was all too brief, every day bringing with it some new pleasure, in addition to the fact that the distance between them and the metropolis was gradually becoming less. And in the contemplation of that fact, Mary found a satisfaction she had never known before. When they

were within a day's journey of the elder Farrell's homestead, situated on what was then the outlying settlement around Sydney, Wilton rode on ahead to convey the news, and Mary was strangely excited. A new life was opening before her, and the next day she would see what for years she had longed to realize.

There was a warm and hearty welcome given to Wilton when he rode up to the trim and comfortable cottage in which the parents of his friend lived, and the hospitable couple became more delighted when he told them of the party who were following him. Mrs. Farrell bustled around immediately he mentioned that Mary and he were going to get married.

"Ride back and show them the way, while we get things fixed up," Farrell exclaimed, and Wilton retraced his steps, meeting the other three a mile or so from the house. They all increased their speed and cantered up to the cottage. Hearing them, Mr. and Mrs. Farrell came from the interior to welcome them. Wilton was at the time helping Mary off her horse, so that she had her back towards the cottage when the couple came out.

"And so this is the——" old Farrell began gaily. Then as Mary turned round and he saw her face he stood still with wide open eyes and a startled look, staring at her.

"This is Mary," Wilton said, before he noticed the amazement of Farrell.

"Kate! Come here, Kate!" the old man said quickly, reaching out a hand towards his wife, but still keeping his eyes on Mary. "Who's that?" he exclaimed, pointing with his other hand at Mary.

Mrs. Farrell looked and screamed, and, running up to Mary, threw her arms around her and held her closely as she exclaimed, "My own dear mistress! My poor dear mistress! Oh, thank God, I've seen her again!"

Mary looked from one to the other and then at Wilton. "What is it?" she asked tremulously.

Farrell seized Wilton by the hand and wrung it heartily as he slapped him on the back and shouted, "Well done, my lad, I'm proud of you."

"But what does it mean?" Wilton asked.

"Mean? Why, Lord love you, she's the dead image of her mother, and it knocked me cold when I saw her."

"My mother?" Mary exclaimed. "Did you know her?" she said to Mrs. Farrell, who was still hugging and kissing her.

"Know her? Why, you poor darling, of course I know her, and so shall you as soon as Jim can ride over and fetch her."

"But she is——" Mary began.

"Here, Jim, take one of the horses and quit sharp. This ain't no time to wait," the motherly woman cried, turning to her husband. "I'll take charge of my dear young mistress till they come, and Wilton will look after the rest."

She led Mary into the cottage, with Narli at their heels, while Farrell jumped on Johnson's horse, and shouting, "I shan't be long, boys," galloped down the road.

Wilton and Johnson looked at each other.

"What does it mean?" the former exclaimed.

"I should say we had better wait and see, though it does look as if some one had gone queer in the head," Johnson replied, as he glanced down the road along which Farrell was riding furiously.

The two stood at the cottage gate, waiting for some idea to come to them which would explain the extraordinary action of the Farrells.

"We had better go inside," Johnson was saying, when a cloud of dust appeared down the road. "Here he comes back," he added.

But besides Farrell there was a buggy, and in that buggy a lady and gentleman. They drove up to the gateway and sprang out.

"Major Pearson!" Wilton exclaimed, as he stepped forward; but the major pushed past him, and, accompanied by his wife, rushed into the cottage. Wilton turned and looked after them, angry and puzzled.

"Good iron, my lad, good iron!" he heard old Farrell exclaim, as he slapped him on the back and threw his hat in the air. "I'm more pleased than I've ever known! Come and have a drink on it."

"But what does it all mean?" Johnson asked quietly.

"Mean?" Farrell cried. "Why, it means that you've found the major's daughter."

"The major's daughter!" Wilton exclaimed.

A figure ran out of the cottage and up to the three, and as Wilton turned to see who it was he met Major Pearson face to face. He seized him by the hands and shook them, as he exclaimed in a broken voice,

"God bless you, my boy! God bless you, my boy!"

"Is it she, major?" Farrell cried.

But the major was too much moved for words, and as he nodded his head in answer, two tears glittered in the sunlight as they fell, and told his companions of the tumultuous joy that was in his heart.

"Come," he said, and led Wilton into the cottage, followed by Johnson and Farrell. At the door of the sitting room he stopped. Mrs. Pearson, with Mary in her arms, sat crying softly, while Mrs. Farrell watched them, her own eyes overflowing. Narli, forgotten but not forgetting, stood beyond them, looking from one to the other. The major led Wilton straight across to his wife, and, taking one of her hands, placed it in Wilton's.

"He found her," he whispered; and Wilton felt the hand he held tighten upon his own. It was all that the mother could spare in that moment of supreme joy.

Later, when matters had settled down into a calmer state, Wilton was overwhelmed with tokens of the parents' love and gratitude, while Johnson's sturdy nature was reduced to distressful uncertainty in the presence of so much emotional demonstration. And Narli—ugly, black, old Narli—was made the queen of the ceremonies, and treated with a lavish generosity that she utterly failed to comprehend. For she was able to supply some information which was invaluable, and which, so far as the Pearsons were concerned, completely proved Mary's identity with the child who had been stolen from their home in the early days of their married life.

Narli had, she said, been carried off a long time ago from her tribe by a white man, who gave her a little white child to take care of. They had

gone a long way, and always through the bush and away from the tracks where white men usually traveled; for the white man was always telling her to keep a sharp lookout for any traces of other white people, and he would never go near the tracks. Once a dray had overtaken them, and they had hidden while it came up and passed them. A man was walking beside it, and a woman nursing a child was sitting in it. Angry words were being spoken by both man and woman, and the man stopped the dray very close to where Narli and her companion were hiding. He kept on muttering to himself all the time that he was lighting a fire and setting the billy to boil. Then the woman came down from the dray with the child in her arms, and said something to the man which made him rage and storm. The woman laughed and jeered at him, until he snatched a rifle from the dray, and fired point blank at the creature who was tormenting him.

The woman fell where she stood, and the man had run away when he saw her fall. When he had gone, Narli and her companion crept out of their shelter, and found both the mother and child dead. The white man laughed, and, taking up the dead child, threw it behind a log, bidding Narli to go back to her camp as he took the other little one from her.

But she was curious, and crept back under shelter of the bush, until she could see all that took place at the half made camp of the drayman. Her companion sat nursing the white child until the man who had shot the woman came back, as he did hours afterwards. Narli saw her companion point to the dead woman, and then hold out the child; and the other man had sat down on the log behind which the other child had been thrown, with his face hidden in his hands.

She saw her companion approach him and lean forward, as though he were emphasizing what he was saying. The other man sprang to his feet, and her companion pointed in her direction. Then the white man who had shot the woman took the child, and Narli hurried on to her camp as she saw her companion set out towards it.

He was smiling grimly as he joined her, and told her that she would have to travel with the other man and look after the little one. Then he went on to tell her that she was never to mention what had occurred or he would come and kill her. He was, he said, going away, and if she ever saw him afterwards she was not to remember him and never to speak to or of him, nor tell the child, when it grew up, of what had taken place in the early portion of its life.

Narli had been handed over to the other man and the child had been given to her to take care of again, and from thenceforward she had had the care of that child, and she had kept the secret so well that not even Giles ever suspected that the girl, who grew up as his daughter Mary, was in reality a stranger to him. And yet his own child had died at the same moment as its mother, when, stung into a fury of raging jealousy by her taunts and jeers, he had in a momentary madness done that which clouded and marred all his subsequent life.

"And he died defending me," Mary said, with tears in her eyes, as she recalled the scene on the night of the attack on Billah, when she was told to

look on the veranda of the burning house and saw the form of a man lying still within a few feet of the roaring flames.

CHAPTER XXI.—RUN TO EARTH.

ALTHOUGH the Pearsons were satisfied that Mary was their child, the striking likeness between her and Mrs. Pearson giving them proof enough, the question was not so easily settled in the eye of the law. Giles having been reported as dead, another victim of the gang he had done so much to suppress, the government decided that the grant of Billah should be available to the only child, and Mary was duly notified that the transfer would be made to her, if she desired it. The major laid the whole matter before his solicitor, who at once pointed out the difficulties which would arise were she to deny her claim to Giles' estate.

"Better get the transfer through and settle the other affair among yourselves," he suggested. The marriage of Mary and Wilton, before the matter was completed, necessitated the substitution of another name for that of Mary Giles, and to dispose of the quibble for all time, the property was made over to Wilton direct.

In the mean time he had been consulting doctors with regard to the bullet wound he had received from Midnight. The wound itself had healed, and although a rib had been cracked and the bullet was embedded somewhere in the muscles of the back, the doctors asserted that no vital damage had been done, and nothing would be gained by trying to find and extract the ball. The only existing obstacle to the marriage having been removed, the ceremony was performed, the major giving the bride away, and Johnson officiating as Wilton's best man.

At the subsequent gathering the major announced the belief that he and his wife had in common as to Mary being their stolen daughter. Legally, he told the astonished guests, it was a difficult thing to prove; but as a matter of belief both he and his wife accepted it, and he was glad to have the opportunity of announcing that Mary and her husband would be joint heirs to all his property and his wife's when they were called hence.

Then the happy couple, united by a hundred ties, went away for their honeymoon, which was to last until Billah was rebuilt, the superintendence of which work Johnson undertook. He also undertook to explain to Farrell that Meleclee had been transferred to him absolutely, and to carry out both tasks as quickly as possible, he started on his homeward journey a day or so after Wilton and Mary were married.

He posted rapidly along and arrived at Toombul just in time to participate in the final escapade of Midnight and his gang.

As he came within the boundaries of his property, he picked up the track of a heavy mob of cattle, and saw by the state of the trail that they had been driven along at a very much higher speed than was usual. He pressed forward, and, as he came in sight of the house, saw the large mob in the home paddock and half a dozen men round the veranda. As he rode up he recognized Farrell and Douglas.

"Good luck to you, old man, you're just in time," Douglas cried out.

"Why, what is in the wind?" Johnson exclaimed, as he dismounted.

"The house is to be burned down tonight," Douglas replied.

"It's this way," Farrell added. "We were on our road up when we fell in with a couple of police who were on a roving commission, and joined our camp. Floods delayed us a bit, and at some places the stock was not ready for us, so we are really some three months late. But a day's journey from here, when we did manage to get through, we were stuck up by our old friend."

"Midnight?" Johnson exclaimed.

"The same," Farrell replied. "He didn't know, evidently, we had troopers with us, and he and his men had a nasty time of it, only himself and two others getting away with their lives. We suffered a bit, too, and made all haste on here, expecting to find you and Wilton. Instead we found Douglas, who made us comfortable, and we decided to camp here until you and Wilton came back. But a day or so since the black came and gave us the tip that tonight Midnight was going to burn the place down and wipe us all out. We sent word round, and have so far managed to muster ten, all good shots and well armed. You make the eleventh, and, as it is your house that is to be burned, you had better take the lead."

"This is very encouraging," Johnson observed, looking around at the men.

"We've drawn up a little scheme of our own," Douglas said. "It means the loss of the house, but we think it will settle Midnight once and for all."

"What's the scheme?" Johnson asked.

"We decided to lie outside, under cover, and wait. If the tale the black fellow brought is true, Midnight only has two white men with him now. That means he would set fire to the place at once and pick us off as we came out. Instead of that we would pick him off; he cannot well dodge half a score bullets all at once, and we were going to let him have a volley, trusting to luck to roll the others over."

Johnson thought for a few minutes in silence.

"We'll soon run up a fresh shanty," one of the men said.

"What do you say?" Farrell asked.

"It's worth trying," Johnson answered at length.

"I doubt if we shall ever want another chance at him," Douglas said as he proceeded to give Johnson the details of their scheme. The places where they would lie under cover had already been selected, and as Johnson went from one to another he saw how entirely the front of the house was commanded.

"If every one fires at the same time it will be impossible for him to escape," he exclaimed.

"We think so," Farrell, who was with him, replied.

"If he does——" Johnson began and stopped. It would not do to let too many into the secret of the cave at the head of the gully. He took an early opportunity of speaking to Douglas. "If he should escape," he said, "he will make for the cave where Wilton was shot. You and I had better keep the knowledge to ourselves and slip away after him."

"That's so," Douglas replied. "We need not tell any one."

As the evening came on the men kept inside the station, and had their supper in silence as a precaution against warning any spies there might be about as to their numbers. Then, when it was dark, they crept out one by one and went to their allotted places, to lie, with rifles ready, for the sight of the man they wanted to shoot, and the signal for their volley.

It was a moonless night, and the hours passed without a sound occurring by which the watchers could learn of the enemy's approach, until a faint glimmer of light sped through the air, and with a slight thud a spear buried itself in the roof of the house, and the fiber tied round it burst into flame. Two more followed, and in another minute the dry sheets of bark were ablaze. The fire spread along the roof and, as it increased, lit up the surrounding bush, and enabled the men lying in ambush to see three figures creeping stealthily towards the veranda.

They divided, one going to either end and the third standing boldly forward in front of the door. The ruddy light fell upon him and lit up his black beard and locks.

Douglas and Johnson lay side by side, and the latter softly whispered, "Take the man on the right, I'll take the other, and leave Midnight to the boys."

Silently they aimed, while the remainder of the party held their fingers on the triggers and waited for the signal shout that Johnson was to give for the volley.

Midnight stood watching the growing fire, and then burst into a loud laugh.

At the same moment Johnson shouted, and the report of the volley cut short the outlaw's mirth. The two men who were posted at either end of the veranda fell, while Midnight staggered blindly forward and stumbled. With a yell of triumph the men sprang from their hiding places and rushed upon him.

Recovering himself, he faced round and raised his rifle. The charging squatters scattered round him as he fired, and under cover of the smoke, he dashed into the bush with all the men after him.

Douglas caught Johnson by the arm.

"It's a race for the cave!" he exclaimed. "He'll double on them, and we'll go as hard as we can to get there before him."

Without waiting to look at the two who were lying where they had fallen, and who, as it happened, were never to rise again, Douglas and Johnson rushed through the bush in the direction of the gully in which the cave was situated. Once they stopped to reload their rifles and listen if any one else were near them, but they could distinguish nothing, and resumed their march. The gray dawn was showing when they came to the edge of the steep bank up which they had carried Wilton. They hastily clambered down, and then hastened along the gully till they reached the boulder at the end.

"Shall we go into the cave or hide up the bank?" Douglas asked.

"Into the cave," Johnson answered, and they turned round the boulder, and, pushing aside the trailing vine, entered.

They found the cave was a small chamber formed by a projecting ledge, the underside of which sloped inwards, leaving barely room for a man to stand upright in the middle. A couple of blankets thrown together, with the ordinary articles of a bushman's camp lying beside them, were all the cave contained.

"I think we shall be better on the bank," Johnson said, as he glanced round him.

"There's not much here," Douglas answered, as he held the vine back and made as if to step out. But a sound caught his ear, and he grasped Johnson by the arm.

"He's coming," he whispered hoarsely.

There was the noise of some one treading heavily and clumsily beyond the boulder, and then a man staggered round it. He groaned as he leaned against it for a moment before he slipped weakly to the ground. There was no mistaking the jet black hair and beard, but the face was ghastly pale now, and the swaggering form of the once redoubtable Midnight was limp and helpless.

As the two squatters stood watching him from behind the sheltering vine, a momentary twinge of pity passed through each, as they saw the man make a great effort to rally himself.

Painfully he struggled to unloosen his coat, and when he had it open they saw under it a crudely, heavily fashioned cuirass. He pulled and tugged at the straps with which it was fastened, and as it fell from him, he leaned back against the boulder once more and gasped.

His head drooped forward on his hands, and the watchers saw his fingers working amongst his hair, and then the mass of raven locks slipped over the head, carrying with them the beard and a roughly made helmet. The exertion of getting them off had almost exhausted the wounded outlaw, and once more he let his head rest against the boulder.

As his face became visible, Johnson and Douglas started to their feet and sprang towards him with loud cries. The face of the stricken man was the face of him whom they had long known as Giles!

He turned towards them and strove to get on his feet; but he was too far gone, and rolled over in a swoon.

The two men stood over him, too horrified to speak, and too indignant to feel even pity for the wretch whose life was ebbing away at their feet. Slowly he regained consciousness, and looked at them with malignant hatred.

"Too late," he gasped out, and lay back, dead.

"Thank God Wilton does not know!" Johnson exclaimed.

"He never shall, nor his wife either," Douglas answered quickly.

"But the story must leak out," said the other.

"Only if you tell it," Douglas replied. "We will bury him where he lies, and bury his secret with him."

G. Firth Scott.

THE END

THE RIVER OF DARKNESS.

A record of some marvelous experiences in the Dark Continent—Why a water journey beneath the earth's surface was undertaken at frightful risks—A voyage on a raft along an unknown course and without the possibility of retreat.

PROLOGUE.

IT was November in London. The great city was buried under a dank, yellow fog. Traffic was temporarily checked; foot passengers groped their way by the light of the street lamps, and the hoarse shouts of the link boys running before cabs and carriages with blazing torches rang at intervals above the muffled rumble of countless wheels.

In the coffee room of a quiet hotel on the Strand a young man stands by the window, looking pensively out on the misty street. He is quite young, with light hair that falls half over his forehead, and a drooping, golden mustache, and in rather startling contrast to these a deep bronzed complexion that tells of foreign lands and tropical suns.

"Captain Chutney, sir?"

It is a hotel servant, with a big blue envelope in his hand, and, as the young man wheels round, he reveals the uniform and bright facings of a captain of hussars.

"Yes, I am Captain Chutney," he replies to the servant. "Thank you," and, taking the blue document, he stands for a moment in deep thoughtfulness.

Well may he hesitate to break that official seal which glares up at him so broadly. Were the gift of futurity his, and he could see mirrored before him the dread panorama of events that are inevitably linked with that innocent looking missive, he would fling it with horror stricken hands into the coal fire that burns on the grate beside him.

But no disturbing thought enters his mind. The future looks bright and cheerful enough just at present, and ripping open the end of the envelope without breaking the seal, he pulls out a folded paper and reads:

COLONIAL OFFICE, DOWNING STREET, S. W.

TO CAPTAIN GUY CHUTNEY:

Your immediate presence is requested on urgent affairs.

(Signed)

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR COLONIAL AFFAIRS.

Chutney looks with some surprise at the famous signature attached with a bold hand. He places the letter in his pocket, pushes open a swinging door at the left, and vanishes up a broad stairway.

In five minutes he reappears, clad in a big mackintosh, and, calling a cab, he rattles off westward through the fog.

He is not in the best of humors. He had made other plans for the day,

for his furlough is up, and tomorrow he leaves for India to rejoin his regiment. He had come up yesterday from the country, where he had put in a week at grouse hunting with his brother, Sir Lucas Chutney, and today he intended bidding good by to old friends, and attending to the making of a few purchases.

Downing Street is not far away, and presently the cab rolls into Whitehall and draws up before the big granite building.

Guy makes his way through the spacious corridors thronged with clerks, civilians, foreigners from every part of the globe, and at last reaches the private apartments of the chief.

The Right Honorable Lord is deeply engaged, but his private secretary receives Chutney cordially, and, leading him back into a still more secluded and stately apartment, motions him to a soft chair and sits down opposite him.

"Captain Chutney," he begins abruptly, "you leave for India tomorrow?"

"India Mail, eight o'clock in the morning," Guy replies briefly.

"Very well. We are going to intrust you with a very important commission. You will stop off at Aden, cross the Gulf of Aden in the semi weekly steamer, and present these documents to Sir Arthur Ashby, the Political Resident at Zaila, the fortified town of the Somali Coast Protectorate."

The secretary hands Guy two bulky envelopes stamped and sealed with the government seal.

"They relate to affairs of importance," he continues. "Your gallant record justifies us in intrusting the papers to your care. You can return in time to take the next steamer. Perhaps I had better tell you this much in confidence," the secretary adds:

"We have received from certain sources information to the effect that the Emir of Harar, on the southern border of Abyssinia, contemplates at no distant date an attack on Zaila. Our garrison there is weak, and, as you probably know, the Somali country is treacherous and unreliable. These papers contain necessary instructions for the Political Resident."

The secretary rises, and Guy gladly follows his example.

"I will see that the papers are delivered," he says earnestly.

"Thank you," the secretary responds. "I am sure that you will. I wish you a safe voyage, Captain Chutney, and fresh Burmese laurels, for you will no doubt take part in the Chittagong expedition."

They shake hands warmly, and in five minutes Guy is rattling citywards again through the increasing fog. Long afterwards he looks back on that morning as the most memorable day of his life. At present his commission sits lightly on his mind. He attends to all his duties in London, catches the India Mail, and two days later is steaming across the Mediterranean on board the P. and O. steamship *Cleopatra*.

CHAPTER I.—THE STOLEN DESPATCHES.

STEADILY the *Cleopatra* had traversed the Mediterranean, passed through the Suez Canal, plowed the burning waters of the Red Sea, and now, on this

bright, sultry day, Aden was left behind, and with smoking funnels she was heading swiftly and boldly for the Indian Ocean.

A smaller steamer, a mere pigmy beside this gigantic Indian liner, had left the harbor of Aden at the same time, and was beating in a southwesterly direction across the gulf with a speed that was rapidly increasing the distance between the two vessels.

On the upper deck stood Guy Chutney, straining his eyes through a pair of field glasses to catch a last glimpse of the *Cleopatra*, and distinguish, if possible, the figures grouped under the white awnings. He had only arrived at Aden last night, and now he was bound for the dreary African coast, while all the gay friends he had made on board the *Cleopatra* were steaming merrily off for Calcutta without him.

It was by no means a comforting state of affairs, and Guy's spirits were at their lowest ebb as the steamer finally faded into the horizon. He put up the glasses and strode forward. From the lower decks came a confused babel of sounds, a harsh jabbering of foreign languages that grated roughly on his ear.

"This is a remarkably fine day, sir."

It was the captain who spoke, a bluff, hearty man, who looked oddly out of place in white linen and a solar topee.

"It is a grand day," said Guy. "May I ask when we are due at Zaila?"

"At Zaila?" repeated the captain, with a look of sudden surprise. "Ah, yes. Possibly tomorrow, probably not until the following day."

It was now Guy's turn to be surprised.

"Do you mean to tell me," he said, "that it takes two or three days to cross the Gulf of Aden?"

"No," replied the captain brusquely. "You are surely aware, my dear sir, that we proceed first to Berbera, and from thence up the coast to Zaila."

"Then you have deceived me, sir," cried Guy hotly. "You told me this morning that this steamer went to Zaila."

"Certainly I did," replied the captain. "You didn't ask for any more information, or I should have told you that we went to Berbera first. The great annual fair has just opened at Berbera, and I have on board large stores of merchandise and trading properties. On other occasions I go to Zaila first, but during the progress of the fair I always go direct to Berbera and unload. I supposed that fact to be generally understood," and, turning on his heel, the captain walked off to give some orders to his men.

Guy was half inclined to be angry at first, but on reflection he concluded he was just as well satisfied. Besides, it would give him a chance to see that wonderful African fair, which he now remembered to have heard about on different occasions.

But one other person was visible on the deck, a short, chunky man, with a dark complexion, and crafty, forbidding features.

A Portuguese or a Spaniard Guy put him down for at once, and he conceived a deep mistrust of him instantly. The fellow, however, was inclined to be sociable.

"Ah, an Englishman," he said, coming up to Guy and holding out his hand, an action which Guy professed not to see.

"You are going to Berbera, perhaps," he went on, nowise discomfited by the rebuff.

"No," said Guy shortly. "To Zaila."

"Ah, yes, Zaila! You have friends there, perhaps? I, too, am acquainted. I know very well Sir Arthur Ashby, the governor at Zaila."

His keen eyes scanned Guy's face closely, and noted the faint gleam of surprise at this information.

But Guy was too clever to be thrown off his guard.

"Yes," he said. "I know some people here. I have not the pleasure of Sir Arthur's acquaintance."

He would have turned away at this point, but the man pulled a card from his pocket and presented it to him. Guy glanced it over with interest:

C. MANUEL TORRES,

Trader at Aden and Berbera.

"A vile Portuguese slave hunter," he thought to himself.

"Well, Mr. Torres," he said. "I am sorry that I have no cards about me, but my name is Chutney."

The Portuguese softly whispered the name once or twice. Then, without further questioning, he offered Guy a cigar, and lit one himself.

Manuel Torres proved to be quite an interesting companion, and gave Guy a vivid account of the wonders of the fair.

As they went below at dinner time he pointed out on the corner of the dock a great stack of wooden boxes.

"Those are mine," he said. "They contain iron and steel implements for the natives and Arabs."

"They look like rifle cases," Guy remarked carelessly; and, looking at the Portuguese as he spoke, he fancied that the dark face actually turned gray for an instant. In a moment they were seated at the table, and the brief occurrence was forgotten.

All that afternoon they steamed on across the gulf, overhead the blue and cloudless sky, beneath them waters of even deeper blue, and at sunset the yellow coast line of the African continent loomed up from the purple distance.

Guy had been dozing under an awning most of the afternoon, but now he came forward eagerly to get his first glimpse of eastern Africa.

To his great disappointment, the captain refused to land.

It was risky, he said, to make a landing at night, and it would be dark when they entered the harbor. They must lie at anchor till morning.

Most of the night Guy paced up and down the deck, sleeping at brief intervals, and listening with eager curiosity to the strange sounds that floated out on the air from the shore, where the flickering glare of many torches could be seen.

Stretched on a mattress, the Portuguese slept like a log, without once awakening.

Before dawn the anchors were lifted, and at the captain's suggestion Guy

hastened down to his cabin to gather up his scanty luggage, for most of his traps had gone on to Calcutta in the *Cleopatra*.

He buckled on his sword, put his revolvers in his pocket, clapped his big solar topee on his head, and then reached down for the morocco traveling case which he had stored away for better security under his berth.

A cry of horror burst from his lips as he dragged it out. The lock was broken, and the sides were flapping apart. For one brief second he stared at it like a madman, and then, with frantic haste, he fell on his knees, and, plunging his hands inside, began to toss the contents recklessly out upon the floor. Toilet articles, linen, cigars, writing paper, jewelry, and various other things piled up until his finger nails scraped the bottom. He turned the case bottom up and shook it savagely, shook it until the silver clasps rattled against the sides, and then he sank back with a groan, while the drops of perspiration chased each other down his haggard cheeks.

The precious despatches were gone.

For the time being Guy was fairly driven out of his senses by the horror of the calamity. Ruin stared him in the face. What madness it was to leave those papers in his cabin! He had foolishly hesitated to carry them on his person for fear the perspiration would soak them through and through, and now they were hopelessly lost. The cabin door had been locked, too. The thief must have had a key.

The first shock over, his manliness asserted itself, and he took a critical view of the situation. He hardly suspected any person as yet. The despatches must be recovered. That was the first step.

He flew up the stairs, three at a time, and rushed panting and breathless upon deck.

All about him was the hurry and bustle of preparation. The shore was close at hand, and the steamer was moving toward the rude wharf. Manuel Torres was leaning over the rail, coolly smoking a cigar. The captain stood near by, gazing intently at the shore. He looked up with wonder as Guy appeared, crying out in hoarse tones:

"I have been robbed, captain, treacherously robbed. Documents of the greatest importance have been stolen from my cabin, and not a soul shall leave this steamer till every inch of it has been searched. I demand your assistance, sir!"

CHAPTER II.—A STRANGE MEETING.

TORRES looked up in apparent surprise from his cigar, and the captain's ruddy face flashed a shade deeper.

"Are you sure, sir?" he cried. "This is a strange place for a robbery."

Guy turned on him hotly.

"A robbery has been committed, nevertheless, and the articles stolen are despatches for the governor of Zaila. They were intrusted to me for delivery, and I look to you to recover them."

"Ah! Government despatches, were they?" said the captain. "Just step below and we'll look into the matter."

They turned toward the cabin, leaving the Portuguese still gazing over the rail.

At the foot of the steps the captain stopped.

"Why, what's this?" he said, stooping down and pulling from under the lowest step a bunch of papers.

"The stolen despatches!" cried Guy wildly. "But look! The seals have been broken."

Together they inspected the documents. Each envelope had been opened, but the contents appeared to be all right. The thief had plainly been satisfied with their perusal.

"Whoever stole them," said the captain, "was afraid to retain them lest a search should be made, and as he had no way to destroy them he tossed them down here where they could easily be found."

"Who else had a key to my cabin?" Guy asked sternly.

"The key to Torres' cabin will open yours," replied the captain, "and several of the crew also have keys."

"Then Torres is the man," said Guy. "The scoundrel looks capable of anything."

"I wouldn't advise you to accuse him," said the captain gravely. "He may cause trouble for you on shore. You must remember that British influence is little felt at Berbera. Your best plan is to say nothing, but relate the whole affair to the governor at Zaila. And now, as we may lie in the harbor here all day, you had better go on shore. You will see a strange sight."

Guy put the recovered documents away in an inner pocket, and followed the captain on deck, in a very angry frame of mind. Torres had disappeared, but Guy felt that he had not seen the last of him.

He half forgot his anger in the strange sight that now met his eyes, for the steamer was just approaching the wharf, and in a moment the gang plank was dropped over the side.

He waited until the eager, jostling crowd of Arabs had passed over, and then he made his way to shore. The spectacle before him was marvelous and entrancing.

Extending apparently for miles up and down the yellow stretch of sand that fringed the coast, was one great sea of canvas that fluttered under the African breeze.

There were tents of every description, some old and dingy, some spotlessly white and shining, and others brilliant in many colors, barred with red and green and yellow, while here and there, from their midst, rose the sun baked walls and towers of the original Berbera, for all this floating canvas belonged to the nomadic population who flock hither from the interior during the fair, and add twenty thousand to the perennial population of the town.

Dazed as though in a dream, Guy moved forward, noting with wonder the strange people who thronged about him and regarded him with evident mistrust. Borne on by the crowd, he found himself presently in the main avenue of the fair, and his first amazed impression was that he had been transported to a scene in the "Arabian Nights."

On either side of the narrow street stretched the sea of tents, and before them, on rude stalls, were ranged everything that the imagination could devise, sacks of coffee and grain, great heaps of glittering ivory, packets of gold dust, aromatic spices and fragrant gums of all sorts, great bunches of waving ostrich plumes, bales of cotton and tobacco, tanned hides of domestic animals, tawny skins of lions, leopards, and panthers, oddly woven grass mats, quaint arms, and bits of carving, fetish ornaments, and even live cattle and sheep tied to the poles of the tents.

Standing guard over their wares were natives from all parts of Africa, Arabs from the Zambesi, savage looking Abyssinians, crafty Somalis with greasy, dangling locks, and brawny, half naked fellows from the interior, the like of whom Guy had never seen or heard.

And up and down the narrow street moved in a ceaseless throng the traders who had come to purchase: Arabs from Aden and Suakim, Egyptians from Cairo, traders from Zanzibar, and a sprinkling of Portuguese and Spaniards.

Some of them bore their goods on camels, others had hired native carriers, who staggered under the heavy bales and cases, and the uproar was deafening and incessant as they wrangled over their bartering and dazzled the eyes of their customers with rolls of English and French silks, pigs of iron, copper and brass, sacks of rice and sugar, glittering Manchester cutlery, American beads, and cans of gunpowder.

The builders of the tower of Babel itself could not have produced such a jargon or variety of tongues, Guy thought, as he picked his way onward, now stopping to gaze at some odd looking group, and now attracted by the harsh music and beating drums of a band of native musicians.

He noted with secret satisfaction the occasional presence in the crowd of a dark skinned soldier in British uniform, and he observed with some surprise the vast number of Abyssinian Arabs, whom he recognized by their peculiar dress.

Finally a stranger sight than all arrested his steps. In a small inclosure, cordoned off by a rope, lay a dozen poor slaves shackled to stakes driven deep in the ground and exposed to the burning sun.

Their owner, a brawny negro with a head dress of feathers, a native of the Galla country, was disputing over their purchase with a gigantic Arab, whose powerful frame irresistibly fascinated Guy's attention.

He wore a loosely flapping cotton gown, confined at the waist by a belt that fairly bristled with knives and pistols, while a scarlet burnous was drawn over his head, affording a brilliant set off to the glittering eyes, the tawny, shining skin, and the short chin beard and mustache.

Behind the group of slaves, chained to the pole of a spacious tent, lay a sleek and glossy leopard, sleeping in the sun as unconcernedly as though he were in the midst of his native desert. The Arab, unaware probably of the beast's presence, walked slowly round the circle inspecting his prospective purchase.

The leopard perhaps was dreaming of the days when he was wont to chase the deer through the jungle, for suddenly his spotted body quivered and his

long tail shot out like a stiffened serpent. The Arab's sandaled foot came down on the tapering end, and with a scream of rage the beast sprang up.

Overcome by a sudden fright, the Arab staggered backward a pace, and like a flash the leopard shot to the end of his chain, and fastening teeth and claws on the unfortunate man's neck, bore him to the ground. Panic stricken, those who stood near made no move. The big negro danced wildly up and down, keeping well out of reach of his savage pet, and the slaves howled with fright.

An instant's delay and the man was lost. Suddenly Guy drew his revolver and sprang forward.

The negro uttered a howl and tried to push him back, but Guy forced his way past him, and pressing the revolver close to the brute's head pulled the trigger.

It was a good shot. The leopard rolled over lifeless, and the Arab, with Guy's assistance, rose to his feet very dazed while the blood dripped down from his lacerated back.

Instantly the scene changed. The negro, angered at the death of his leopard, advanced menacingly on Guy with a drawn knife, and in response to his summons other negroes rallied to his aid.

But the Arab, too, had friends in the crowd, and they, pressing forward in turn, made it seem as though a bloody conflict was inevitable.

Just as the issue was trembling in the balance, a shout arose from the crowded street,

"The white man! Make room for the white man!" and through the parted ranks Guy saw advancing a bronzed Englishman in white flannels and helmet.

The stranger pushed right in through the sullen group of negroes until he reached the open space before the tent, and stood face to face with Guy.

Their eyes met in one amazed glance that startled the wondering spectators, and then from Guy's lips burst a glad, hoarse cry:

"Melton Forbes, or I am dreaming!"

"Chutney, by Jove! My dear fellow, can it be possible?"

All else forgotten in their deep joy of meeting, the two bronzed Englishmen fell into each other's arms, and the Arabs and negroes dimly comprehending what it all meant, shouted in sympathy, and lowered their arms.

CHAPTER III.—THE ARAB'S WARNING.

FOR a little while the British officer and the British newspaper correspondent could do nothing but stand off to look at each other, and then embrace again as though it were hard to believe that it was not all a dream.

The Arabs and negroes had drawn to one side, and the big savage was wrathfully inspecting the body of the leopard.

"Come," said Melton, plucking Guy's arm, "we will find a quiet place where we can talk in peace."

The crowd made way for them, but before they had taken half a dozen steps the big Arab staggered forward and seized Guy by the hand.

"You brave man," he cried. "Makar never forget."

He kept on with many protestations of gratitude until Guy tried to withdraw in embarrassment.

"Wait," said the Arab. "Come along. Me tell you something."

He fairly dragged Guy back to the entrance to the tent where none could hear, and bending low he whispered in his ear:

"Berbera no place for Inglis man this day. Better go way, quick. Heed what Makar tell you. Now go."

He fairly pushed Guy from him, and the latter, joining Melton, who had witnessed the scene with the greatest curiosity, led the way out into the street.

A curious crowd followed them closely for some distance and not a word was spoken until they had turned off into a side avenue lined with low mud buildings.

"Now," said Melton quickly, "I need not tell you, my dear fellow, what a pleasant surprise this meeting has been, but all explanation must be deferred to a more suitable time. You have made a friend and an enemy today, for Makar Makalo is the most powerful Arab in the whole Somali country, while that big negro is Oko Sain, the head chief of all the Gallas who dwell two hundred miles back from the coast. What did Makar tell you?"

Guy repeated the Arab's warning, and Melton stood for a moment in deep thought.

"I suspected as much," he said finally. "Never before have there been so many Arabs and Somalis from the interior at Berbera. Only yesterday a caravan of two thousand camels arrived from Harar in the Galla country. Something is wrong, I have felt certain, and now Makar confirms my fears."

A glimmering suspicion of the truth flashed over Guy's mind at this juncture, but he hesitated to speak.

"Now then," continued Melton, "this can mean nothing but a massacre. The only soldiers in the place are about sixty of the Bombay infantry, who were sent down here from Zaila, and as for the fortifications, they are nothing but a few mud walls. There they lie yonder," and he pointed to an English flag fluttering over the house tops some distance away.

"We are only wasting time here," he added. "We'll look about a little and then I'll decide what to do. I don't want to raise any false alarm."

They turned back to the main avenue. The crowds still surged up and down, and the tumult seemed as harsh and discordant as ever, but the place had nevertheless undergone a change since they had left it a short time before. Little bartering was going on, and but few Arabs and Somalis were to be seen. Those on the street were mostly harmless traders from Aden and Cairo.

"What has become of all the Arabs?" asked Guy.

"That is just what I want to know," said Melton; "I'll soon find out, though. Walk as fast as you can now, Chutney, and look as unconcerned as possible."

Melton led the way down the street for a little distance, and turning into a side passage, soon stopped before a low, one story building.

A dard skinned fellow clad in ordinary Egyptian costume stood in the doorway, and with a cry of surprise Guy recognized Mombagolo, Forbes' trusty savage servant, who did much good service for them when they were in Burma together.

Their greeting was brief and hasty.

"I have work for you, Momba," said Melton. "Something is going on in the town, I don't know just what. You can go anywhere without being suspected. Find out what you can, and then come down to the wharf. Don't return here."

The man hastened away at once, and then Guy and Melton started for the shore.

"I won't give any alarm at the garrison," said Forbes, as they hurried along. "I'll wait till Momba reports. I don't suppose anything is contemplated before nightfall at the earliest, and as the troops are scattered it would only precipitate matters if I should have them called in."

The last bale of goods was being unloaded from the steamer when they reached the wharf. The captain and officers were smoking cigars against the rail, and catching sight of Guy, the former called out :

"Don't forget now. Six o'clock sharp."

Guy nodded, and followed Melton to one side, where the two sat down on a bale of cotton. Melton briefly explained how he came to be at Berbera. After his return from Burma, he had been despatched as war correspondent of the *London Post* to Suakim, which town was at that time threatened by the Mahdi.

Mombagolo, or Momba as Melton now called him, had become his faithful servant, and a week ago, the war scare at Suakim having subsided, Melton had come to Berbera to write up the great fair for his paper.

Then Guy, in his turn, simply stated that he had stopped off on his way to India to execute a commission at Zaila. He made no reference to the despatches, feeling doubtful whether it would be proper or not, for a government secret is a thing of weighty importance.

The conversation drifted to their perilous adventures in Burma, and the time passed on unheeded.

At last Melton glanced up.

"Do you observe how quiet it is?" he exclaimed. "And look ! There are but few people in sight."

It was indeed quiet. A dead, oppressive calm had settled on the sea ; not a breeze rustled, not a ripple broke the glassy surface of the water, and from the town, instead of the loud babel of cries, came only a low murmur like a distant waterfall. A strange calm indeed, the calm that serves as precursor to the unseen storm.

Suddenly, with startling abruptness, a rifle shot broke the silence with its shuddering echoes. Guy and Melton sprang to their feet. The officers on the steamer crowded to the rail, up in the town dark figures ran to and fro, a soldier in bright uniform was seen speeding toward the garrison, and now

plunging madly toward the wharf came a white clad figure, pursued by a howling group of Somali warriors, who brandished long spears and daggers. A shot from Melton's pistol brought them to a sudden halt, and Momba, for it was indeed he, ran a few paces and fell breathless at his master's feet.

"What fiendishness is this?" shouted the captain furiously, from the deck of the steamer.

Momba staggered to his knees.

"The Arabs!" he cried. "They are coming—they have rifles—the Portuguese—he broke open long boxes—and handed out guns—Makar's men all have them—the Somalis have them—they have plenty shells——"

Guy ground his teeth.

"The infernal scoundrel!" he cried. "So that's what those long boxes of his contained!"

"You mean Torres?" exclaimed Melton. "I know the villain. He is a partner of Makar Makalo's. But come. We must fight our way to the garrison."

Alas! too late! Bang—bang—bang, bang—bang, a fusillade of rifle fire rang out from the town, hideous yells of triumph mingled with cries of despair and agony, and over the garrison walls floated a constantly increasing cloud of white smoke. The firing deepened, and a hoarse yell arose as the English flag, shot from its staff, fluttered down into the curling smoke.

"They are murdering the garrison!" cried Melton.

He grasped a revolver in each hand, and would have gone madly forward, but at that moment a louder tumult burst forth close at hand, and swarming down the crooked street, curving in and out through the tents and heaped up stalls, came a fierce and frantic horde of Arabs and Somalis, waving rifles and spears, and yelling like ten thousand fiends.

"On board for your lives!" shouted the captain, and as Guy and Melton dashed over the gangplank, followed by Momba, a kick from the captain sent it whirling down into the water.

Providentially, steam was up, slowly the engines started, the screw revolved, and just as the steamer moved slowly out into the harbor, the enraged mob swept to the very edge of the wharf. In futile rage they let fly showers of spears and a scattering rifle fire that pierced and shattered the wood work of the vessel, but fortunately without effect, for every man had got safely below.

CHAPTER IV.—THE ALARM.

THEY rushed up on deck again as soon as the steamer was beyond rifle shot. A distant roar, like the blended shouts of thousands of people, floated across the water from the town, and at intervals a shot was fired.

Smoke no longer hovered over the garrison. The last man had succumbed, and with the fall of the garrison the massacre seemed to have come to an end. The uprising had been directed against the British troops alone.

"This is a terrible thing," said Melton, "and there is something back of it all. I can't understand it. Can it be possible the wretches have designs

on Zaila, I wonder? It's a pity you interfered with that leopard, Chutney. If Makar Makalo had perished, this revolt might never have broken out. Makar is at the head of it, I know, and possibly he has influence behind him. He is an ally of that fanatical despot, Rao Khan, the Emir of Harar, who hates the English worse than poison, and——"

Guy started at the mention of this name.

"I want to see you a minute, Forbes," he cried excitedly; and, leading Melton to one side, he pulled out the despatches from his pocket, and said, "You have come closer to the truth than you imagine. I am going to confide a secret to you, and you can tell what had best be done. These papers were intrusted to me for delivery into the hands of Sir Arthur Ashby, at Zaila, and they contain instructions bearing on the very matter you have just mentioned. The authorities at the colonial office in London told me in secret that the Emir of Harar was supposed to be plotting the capture of Zaila, and these despatches contain Sir Arthur's orders in case of that emergency."

"By Jove, that explains it!" cried Melton. "The emergency has come. I see it all. Makar had collected his Arabs and Somalis at Berbera by the Emir's orders, and they were only waiting the arrival of that villainous Portuguese with the rifles. They have put the garrison at Berbera out of the way, and now they will march on to Zaila."

"Then what can be done?" demanded Guy. "Shall we proceed to Zaila, or get the captain to steam direct for Aden and collect all the available troops?"

"No, no," groaned Forbes. "That would be useless. Zaila is sixty miles up the coast. We can beat the Arabs, and get there in time to prepare the town for defense. The garrison is wretchedly small, but they will have to hold out until assistance can come from Aden."

Melton was still more astounded when Guy told him of the stealing of the despatches.

"Then Torres knows their contents," he said, "and he will act accordingly. This is certainly a bad business, Chutney. Those papers must be delivered to Sir Arthur as soon as possible, though, to tell the truth, I fear Zaila is doomed. But we are losing precious time. Something must be done at once."

They called the captain aside, and told him just enough to impress him with the danger threatening Zaila, and he readily fell in with their plans.

Twilight was now falling, and by the time darkness had settled over the blue waters of the gulf, the steamer was plowing her way steadily northward, Berbera but faintly visible in the rear by the glow of the burning torches.

Hour after hour they steamed on. Neither Guy nor Melton could sleep, but sitting aft on camp stools they talked in whispers of the dread events they had witnessed, and of what might be before them.

At midnight the steamer came to a sudden stop. The machinery, exerted to the highest pressure, had broken in some part. A delay was inevitable, the captain assured them, but in a couple of hours the repairs could be made.

Morning came, revealing the distant yellow line of the African coast, but still the steamer lay at anchor, rocked gently by the blue waters of the gulf.

It may be imagined with what a fever of impatience Guy and Melton lived through those weary hours.

It was nearly midday when the repairs were completed, and the vessel forged ahead again. For fear of fresh accidents, the captain refused to crowd on steam, and when at last the turrets and brown walls of Zaila came in view, it was late in the afternoon.

At a distance, all seemed peaceful; the English flag was floating from half a dozen different buildings of the town. In the harbor lay three or four Arab dhows and a neat little steamer, which the captain said belonged to the governor, and was used for transporting troops or despatches.

Captain Waller anchored close by the town, and accompanied Guy, Melton, and Momba on shore in a small boat. So far, at least, all was well.

A few Arabs and Somalis were sitting around lazily on the sand, and troops of the Bombay Infantry were seen moving about the streets.

"Appear as unconscious as possible," whispered Melton. "Let nothing be suspected."

A close observer might have detected traces of suppressed curiosity on the faces of the Arabs and Somalis, but they were evidently deceived by the careless manner of the new arrivals, for after a keen scrutiny they settled back into lazy attitudes.

"I don't like the looks of those fellows," said Melton, "and another thing I don't like is the presence of those Arab dhows in the harbor. But look, Chutney, there is the residency ahead of us."

They were approaching a low building of sun baked brick, with Venetian awnings at the entrance and windows. Half a dozen sentries were on guard, and an officer came forward to meet the little party.

Guy saluted.

"I am the bearer of important despatches for the governor of Zaila," he said, "and must see him at once."

The officer disappeared for a moment, and presently came back and announced that the governor would see them. They were ushered in through a wide hall, and, passing half along its length, they turned to the right, and found themselves in the presence of Sir Arthur Ashby. He was a very pompous looking man of middle age, with reddish mustache and long side whiskers. He was seated on an easy chair beside an ebony table. Opposite him sat an English officer.

They were smoking cigars, and on the table were glasses and champagne bottles packed in ice. Lamps were lit, for already twilight was falling.

He half rose as his visitors entered, and then dropped back. Guy briefly introduced himself and party, and handed Sir Arthur the despatches, explaining how the seals came to be broken, but making no mention of Torres.

The governor knit his brow as he read them over, and then, to his companion, he remarked lightly, "All nonsense, all nonsense. Another government scare, Carrington."

"I beg your pardon, Sir Arthur," said Guy, "but I was informed in London of the tenor of those despatches. Yesterday afternoon the Arabs at Berbera massacred the garrison to a man, and are doubtless now marching on

Zaila. We barely escaped with our lives. Captain Waller and Mr. Forbes and his servant will confirm my statement."

Sir Arthur sprang to his feet with a sharp cry.

"What is this you tell me?" he gasped. "Can it be true?"

Guy repeated his account, with all the particulars, but the governor actually seemed incredulous.

"Colonel Carrington," he cried, "how many troops have we?"

"Five companies of the Bombay Infantry," replied the colonel in a hollow tone. "We had six yesterday, but if this account be true——"

"Don't delay a moment," shouted Sir Arthur; "prepare for the defense, colonel, and see that the steamer is ready in case it comes to the worst."

The governor's condition was now truly pitiable. He was trembling with fright.

"There is indeed but little time," said Guy. "There is danger at your very door. I see many Arabs and Somalis in the town."

"True, true," groaned Sir Arthur, and, turning over the despatches with trembling hands, he added, "I am instructed to order troops from Cairo and Suakim. What madness! What madness!"

Sir Arthur continued to talk in a rambling, excited way until Colonel Carrington assumed control of affairs.

"Your steamer is here now?" he said to the captain. "Then you must make haste to Aden, and bring us what troops you can. I doubt, though, if we can resist a heavy attack for twenty four hours. And you, gentlemen, you will return on the steamer?"

"No, we will remain," Guy and Melton replied almost in one voice.

The colonel glanced at them approvingly.

"You are brave men," he said. "Stop!" he added suddenly. "You say you left Berbera at sunset last night, and were delayed by an accident. Were there any camels there?"

"A caravan of two thousand arrived two days ago," replied Melton.

The colonel's face paled.

"Then the enemy are due here now," he said huskily. "On camels they could traverse the sixty miles in from fifteen to twenty hours. It is already dark," and he pointed out through the window.

At this Sir Arthur groaned aloud, and tossed down three or four glasses of champagne in rapid succession.

"To your steamer, quick!" cried the colonel, addressing Captain Waller; "and you, gentlemen, since you decide to throw your fate in with ours, come with me, and we will inspect the fortifications, and do what little we can."

They had risen to their feet, and were giving a hasty look to their arms, when a bright flash lit up the gloom from without, followed by a sharp report, and at the same moment, from all quarters of the town, rose a continuous rifle firing, a violent uproar and shouting, and a deep beating of drums.

Sir Arthur sprang to his feet, crying frantically, "To the steamer, to the

steamer—it is our only hope ;” but before he could take a step the outer doors were burst open, shouts were heard in the hall, and then, through the curtained entrance, staggered blindly an officer of infantry, his uniform torn and disheveled, and blood pouring from half a dozen wounds. He plunged forward, and rolled in a lifeless heap at the very feet of Colonel Carrington.

CHAPTER V.—THE NIGHT ON THE ROOF.

THE tragic scene described at the close of the preceding chapter, following on the very heels of the outbreak, was a fearful shock to all who saw it, and for an instant they could only stare at one another with mute, frightened faces.

Colonel Carrington broke the spell. With drawn sword he made a dash for the door, closely followed by the rest, but before they could cross the apartment a louder burst of firing came from the very courtyard, bullets whistled through the windows, and then a scuffle broke out in the hall, and angry voices were heard. It was over in a moment ; a cry of pain, a low groan, followed by the sound of bars dropped in their sockets, and then into the room burst three Hindoo soldiers, grimy with blood and powder.

“ Sahib colonel,” cried the foremost, “ we are lost. The Arabs and Somalis have revolted. Hundreds of them surround the residency. Yonder in the hall lies a dead Somali. We have barred the doors, but they will soon be in.”

Even as he spoke, the portals shook under a succession of thunderous blows.

“ The rear door,” cried the colonel. “ We may escape that way.”

“ No, no ; the building is surrounded,” rejoined the Hindoo. “ There is no escape.”

He was right. Shouts were heard on all sides, the blows on the doors redoubled, and stray shots came in at the windows, both front and rear.

Sir Arthur lay prostrate in his chair.

“ The roof ! the roof ! ” he groaned. “ We must take to the roof.”

“ By Jove, he’s right,” cried the colonel. “ It’s our last hope. Blow out the lights and come on, quick ! ”

The lamps were out in a second, but a dim glare still shone into the room from the torches outside. With an effort, Sir Arthur staggered to his feet. Two of the soldiers assisted him, and then in great haste they hurried through the hall to a rear room.

The building was of one story, and from this apartment a ladder led to an open trap overhead.

Sir Arthur was pushed up first, followed closely by the rest, and just as Momba brought up the rear and dragged the ladder after him, the great residency doors gave way with a crash, and a wild yell of triumph told only too plainly that the enemy had effected an entrance.

Guy’s quick eye observed a big flat stone lying near, a precautionary measure provided by some former governor, no doubt, and, calling on Momba to assist him, he dragged it over the trap.

From below came a rush of footsteps and the sound of smashing furniture as the Arabs hurried to and fro in search of their prey.

"We are safe for the present," said the colonel; "they can't possibly reach us, and they may not even discover where we are."

The roof comprised the whole extent of the building, and was probably thirty feet square. It was surrounded by a stone parapet three feet in height, and from this parapet the little band of fugitives witnessed a scene that none forgot to his dying day.

North and west of the residency the town seemed to be in comparative quiet and darkness, for only stray lights were to be seen at intervals. But off to the south lay the fortifications, and here a sharp conflict was waging.

Through the darkness of the night the flash of every shot was seen, and all along the line blazed out three continuous sheets of flame as the beleaguered garrison poured their fire into the attacking parties that advanced from both sides.

"They can't hold out an hour," said Melton. "The foe are too strong for them."

A sharp cry from Captain Waller turned all eyes on the harbor, where the water was illumined by twinkling lights and the flash of rifles. The meaning of this was plain. The steamer had been attacked. No doubt those innocent looking dhows had been filled with armed Arabs, waiting for the signal, and now every escape was cut off. The firing was sharp and severe for a while, and then it gave way to loud cheers.

The steamers had fallen into the hands of the enemy.

"There goes the last hope," said the colonel; "and look, even the garrison has succumbed."

It was true. The firing had almost entirely ceased, and the few stray shots that still rang out were drowned in the vast roar that rose from all parts of the town.

The residency was cordoned by a surging mass of wretches, intoxicated with triumph, and fresh hordes came pouring in, riotous from the slaughter of the garrison.

"Some cunning fiend has planned all this," muttered Colonel Carrington, "and planned it infernally well, too."

"The Arab, Makar Makalo, is the ringleader, sir," said Melton, "but he is only acting for Rao Khan, the Emir of Harar, who has long desired the port of Zaila."

"A swift retribution will come," replied the colonel, "but it will come too late to aid us."

No person seemed inclined to talk. Sir Arthur sat up against the parapet in a sort of stupor, and the three Hindoos were grouped on one side, and Momba mutely followed his master from point to point, as with Guy and the colonel he made the circuit of the housetop.

And now for the first time it became evident that the presence of the fugitives on the roof was known. Thousands of Arabs and Somalis surrounded the building, their dark faces plainly seen in the glare from the torches, but no hostile demonstration was made. They appeared to be waiting on some-

thing or some one. It was very evident that the whole population of the town were in revolt. It was equally plain, too, that they had been prepared for this uprising, for it had apparently broken out, in all quarters of the town at once, and the expected signal had no doubt been the approach of the Arabs from Berbera, for the vast number of rifles used in the fight proved conclusively their arrival.

Wonderful success had crowned their plans. Yesterday the garrison at Berbera had fallen to a man ; and now Zaila was in their hands, and all that remained of the British possessors was the miserable band of fugitives on the residency roof.

With bitter feelings Guy looked down on the sea of faces. He was wondering if he would ever see Calcutta or England again. But he had been in worse predicaments before, and, hopeless as it now seemed, something might turn up to save them yet.

Melton was inclined to think that the Arabs were only waiting for daylight to make their attack, and yet they seemed to have no idea of abandoning their position, but encircled the building with a sea of torches, talking loudly and excitedly all the while.

Once Guy ventured to peer down over the parapet, and to his surprise he saw Arab guards at the residency door, sternly keeping back the crowd. Then he pulled aside the stone from the trap. All was dark and quiet beneath. The solution to this mystery was close at hand.

Of a sudden a great hush fell on the vast crowd, the tumult died away to a low murmur, and from the outskirts came a strange sound, at first low and indistinct, and then louder and more vivid, like the tinkling of bells mingled with the trampling of hoofs.

The Arabs and Somalis fell silently apart, leaving open a wide passage like a swath cut through a field of standing corn that led straight to the residency doors. Up this triumphal avenue trotted a dozen stalwart Arabs bearing lighted torches, and directly behind came a gigantic camel, decorated with gorgeous trappings and hung with strings of silver bells. And on the camel's back, gazing haughtily around him, sat the Arab, Makar Makalo.

"Behold Makar Makalo, the new ruler of Zaila !" cried the heralds, and from the vast crowd burst one universal shout of satisfaction.

CHAPTER VI.—A FATE WORSE THAN DEATH.

At sight of the daring Arab chief Guy could scarcely restrain himself. He would have drawn his revolver and shot him down then and there, but Colonel Carrington interfered.

"Don't excite them," he said cautiously ; their punishment is sure in the end. How can they defend Zaila against the British gunboats that will be sent here? We have possibly a chance for our lives yet. Don't destroy that last chance."

The colonel plainly had strong hopes. It is well enough in some cases to fight to the very last, and have your names printed in the army list as heroes who died at their post, but in this case the safety of Sir Arthur was plainly

the important point, and any concession must be made to secure this. So all idea of making a fight of it was given up. Short and brief would have been the struggle for Guy and Melton, as the three Hindoos were the only ones armed, and they had but a scant supply of ammunition.

Makar held a short conversation with three or four Arabs, and then, slipping down from his camel, he walked off a little way from the residency and shouted loudly, "Inglis men, come down. You no be killed. You prisoners of war."

The idea of Makar's investing this bloody outbreak with all the dignity of legitimate warfare was ridiculous, and the colonel laughed.

"What's that about prisoners?" cried Sir Arthur, coming eagerly forward. "Will they spare our lives, I wonder? Let me talk to the fellow. I'll try to conciliate him."

He walked pompously to the parapet and bent over. Perhaps the champagne he had drunk had affected his head. At all events he leaned a little too far, and suddenly losing his balance toppled over and fell with a crash plump on the heads of the two Arab sentries at the door. All three came to the ground in a heap, and it was a great relief to the anxious watchers above to see Sir Arthur stagger to his feet apparently unhurt.

The effect on the Arabs was electric. The remaining guards glanced up apprehensively, and very speedily changed their location.

As for Makar he evidently believed that Sir Arthur had come down expressly in response to his summons, for he waited for the rest to follow his example.

"Bless my heart!" muttered Sir Arthur. "What a narrow escape!"

He started toward Makar, but two Arabs laid hold of him and pulled him down roughly to one side.

"We'd better go down," said the colonel, and raising his voice he shouted,

"Do you swear to preserve our lives if we come down?"

"By the shades of Mohammed, I swear it. Come down," replied Makar.

"We'll have to trust to his word," said the colonel. "Put the ladder in position."

The ladder, with one end on the ground, failed to reach the top of the parapet by four or five feet. It was a ticklish business to drop down on the upper round, but one by one they accomplished it, and descending to the ground, were speedily seized and relieved of everything on their persons.

Perhaps Makar doubted his ability to keep his word, for he hurried his prisoners into the residency, away from the turbulent crowd, and left them in the hall in custody of a dozen armed Arabs.

They had not been here five minutes when a commotion was heard outside, and the shattered doors were pulled apart to admit half a dozen weary, blood stained soldiers of the garrison. They were the last survivors, and they told a fearful tale of woe.

The fortifications had been attacked, they said, at the same time by the population of the town on one side, and on the south by a vast horde of Arabs and Somalis, who suddenly appeared over the sand hills mounted on

camels. They alone had been made prisoners. All others had been shot, including the officers, the port surgeon, and the native assistant resident.

This sad story brought tears to the eyes of all, and even Sir Arthur waxed terribly indignant and prophesied speedy retribution.

But now the guards sternly forbade conversation. An hour or more passed on, during which time many persons indistinguishable in the gloom, passed in and out of the residency.

Then came a summons to appear before the chief.

"Don't be alarmed," said Sir Arthur reassuringly. "We shall be sent across the gulf of Aden. This wretch will not dare do injury to her majesty's representatives."

Sir Arthur's sudden change of spirits was not shared by the rest.

"Nerve yourself," Melton whispered to Guy. "I have an idea of what is coming," and before Guy could reply they were ushered into the very apartment which they had left so hastily a few hours before.

It had undergone no change. The lamps had been relit, the wine bottles and glasses still stood on the table, and in Sir Arthur's chair of state sat Makar Makalo, very stern and dignified, while around him, squatted on the rugs, were four Arabs of superior caste and intelligence, comprising, no doubt, the freshly formed cabinet of the great governor of Zaila.

Makar waited until his captives had ranged themselves along the wall, and then with great *sang froid*, he helped himself to a cigar from Sir Arthur's choice box of Partagas, lit it, and then poured off a glass of champagne which he despatched at a gulp.

Having thus proved beyond a doubt that he possessed all the chief qualifications of a British political resident, he settled back in his chair and surveyed his prisoners with lowering brow.

"Bless my heart!" ejaculated Sir Arthur. "What most amazing impu—" a sudden rap on the head from one of the guards cut short his speech, and he relapsed into indignant silence.

Makar was plainly a man of iron nerve, for he met calmly and even boldly the indignant, defiant glances that were turned upon him as he scanned the row of prisoners ranged before him.

Glancing toward the windows he dispersed with a wave of his hand the dark swarm of faces peering eagerly within, and then at last he deigned to break the silence which had become so ominous.

"I have promised ye your lives," he said. "Makar never breaks his word. Allah is great, and it is the will of Allah that Zaila should belong to the true followers of the prophet. Already has his will been fulfilled. The hated Inglis soldiers are dead. Rao Khan is the ruler of Zaila, and Makar is his servant."

He paused and helped himself to another glass of champagne. It was evident that Makar was not at heart a true follower of the prophet, for the Koran strictly forbids all intoxicants.

Another impressive pause followed. Guy glanced at Melton and was alarmed to see the dead white pallor on his face. Melton alone perhaps knew what was coming. On the rest the blow fell with crushing severity.

"Have I not said that Makar's word is inviolate?" the Arab resumed, leaning forward and uttering each syllable sharply and distinctly.

"Can Makar break his pledge?" and he turned to his solemn visaged ministers.

"No, no, no," they muttered in guttural accents, and solemnly shaking their heads.

"Then hark ye all," Makar went on. "I have sworn on the Koran that whatsoever prisoners fell to my lot should be delivered over as slaves to the Somalis of the Galla country. I have spoken. It is Kismet. At day-break ye start for the interior."

Sir Arthur staggered back against the wall with a dismal groan, the Hindoos fell on their knees begging piteously for mercy. Colonel Carington seemed dazed, stupefied, Guy clinched his hands and made a desperate effort to bear up bravely, while Melton's face wore the same pale, hopeless expression.

No one spoke. Supplications and prayers would-alike be useless. The Arab's stern, pitiless countenance spoke plainer than words. Mercy was an unknown word in his vocabulary.

"Spare us, spare us!" moaned Sir Arthur, coming forward a pace or two and making as though he would fall on his knees.

"I have spoken," cried Makar harshly. "Words will avail ye nothing."

He made a signal to the guards, who at once closed in on the wretched captives and led them away.

William Murray Graydon.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A TRADE DOLLAR TRAGEDY.

The entanglements precipitated upon an abettor of true love—Parts played in the plot by a jealous wife, a matched team, a disguised locket, and a rabbit.

THERE is no use in denying the fact. I never mention it, and Julia does not know that it exists to mention; but—Julia is jealous. Heaven only knows why she should be. I never have too much time to devote to my own family, without looking about at other men's wives. And as for young girls, it is ridiculous to suppose that they even realize that there is such a person as Dick Winthrop on the face of the earth.

I confess that I am forty five, my hair is gray, and I am growing stout. I look at the various appliances for reducing obesity as they are advertised in the daily papers, and wonder how a man has the requisite nerve to go up and ask an impudent young string of a drug clerk for one of the things. It is unconscious working of the mind, I suppose. I may be getting up sufficient momentum to go through the ordeal by the time I can no longer do without these assistances to a respectable figure.

But Julia sees none of this. She has a water color portrait of myself that was made the year we were married. It shows a slim, drooping shouldered young man, with his hair waved over his brow, a lackadaisical expression,

and a low necked shirt. I always feel like asking him out of the frame and kicking him as a consummate ass ; but he is the man Julia loved—loves ! And she has an odd fancy that twenty years later she is still married to him. It would seem a pity to try to undeceive her ; besides, you couldn't do it. A woman always fancies that the man *she* loved must be equally fascinating to all her sex.

It might be flattering, if it were not so ridiculous, to be hedged about with conjugal solicitude when a man comes to forty, fatherhood, and general commonplaceness.

This last spring Jim Reynolds came down to Salaville to make us a short visit. I knew perfectly well why he came. Mary Marston was staying at her grandfather's just across the way, and she and Jim were violently in love with each other, in the hot headed way of a boy and girl. He is twenty four, and she is nineteen, and the prettiest girl I ever saw.

The Marstons and the Reynoldses have not been friends since the great law suit about the mills ten years ago, and any question of a marriage between the two was not to be entertained for a single moment, as long as Jim was dependent upon his father for support. He was making preparations for going into one of the mills, and these two young geese dreamed dreams about a day of love in a cottage with the usual accompaniments.

Jim had confided the whole story to me. It would have been more natural for him to tell it to Julia, but she never had liked the lad's mother, whom she called a "married flirt," and some of her resentment seemed to go to Jim. Then, too, the Marstons were dear friends of hers, and she would certainly have felt it her duty to let a little distilled drop of warning fall into the ears of somebody, had she known that Jim and Mary were engaged.

She never suspected it. Jim gave it out that he came down to get a practical knowledge of the workings of a factory from me, and Mary was on a demure visit to her grandfather, who was old and good natured, and buried in his library, just across the street.

The lovers had a delightful time, wandering in the fields about Salaville, and exploring the roads for miles around. I used to start out in the morning, taking Jim in my buggy factoryward. He would leave me at the gate of the works, and drive back toward town. Ten to one Miss Marston would be strolling along the road outside of town, and could be induced to take the seat by Jim's side and go for a drive. My Kentucky mare, Betty B., was a famous traveler, and cared nothing for dust and heat and miles ; and it is my firm conviction, based upon observation and past—long past—experience, that these two young people never knew such things existed.

Late at night, after Mary was shut up in her little white room across the way, Jim would sit out on the veranda with me, and, while I smoked, he lifted up his voice in praise of his divinity.

One morning, at breakfast, Julia came down a little late. Johnny had been ailing the night before from a superfluity of sour cherries, and my wife had left me to my slumbers and had spent the night in the nursery. As she came in, I noticed an unusual tightness about her upper lip. It seemed to

meet the lower one with an unusual degree of pressure, and there was a woodenness about her shoulders that was not inviting.

"My dear," I said soothingly, "I certainly think it a shame that the gluttony of that child should give you a bad night. Let me insist upon his being kept from all fruit."

"If he is at all like the rest of mankind that will only make a sneak of him," said my wife icily.

Neither of us seemed to know exactly where it came in, but we felt a breeze somewhere, and Jim rushed into the conversation in an effort to close the gap.

"We didn't get to bed until late, either. Mr. Winthrop and I sat out on the steps talking until almost midnight."

"I heard you," said my wife laconically.

Jim gave me a frightened look, and, regardless of consequences, I dashed into the breach.

"We were talking about Miss Marston across the way," I said. I *knew* she had heard that name, but I also knew that we were generally speaking too low, and especially upon important points, for the full conversation to reach the nursery windows. "I was telling Jim what a very beautiful young girl she was."

"It seems to me," said my usually well bred wife, "that a man with a child suffering from cholera morbus might have found something better to do than discuss a young woman."

"Indeed, my dear," said I, "had I known you were going to have such a trying night, I should have come in to stay with the boy myself, at least part of the night."

"After you were through extolling Miss Marston, I suppose."

I said no more. When a woman is tired and unreasonably cross, there is no remedy.

Jim didn't have his drive that morning. But three hours later we saw Mary out walking with a cub of a boy about twelve years old, and in the noon mail there came a note saying that her young brother Cecil had come down to stay for a week, and he would be certain to see and report everything she did. Accompanying the note was a little square box containing a silver trade dollar. A slip of paper was across it. "Press on the E in the word 'States.'"

Jim brought it to me just as it was, and then he took it out and looked it over. It looked exactly like a trade dollar, and indeed that is what it was; but its lightness, to one accustomed to handling coin, would have shown that there was something unusual about it.

Jim put the tip of his thumbnail upon the E, and the side lifted itself, discovering a tiny miniature of Mary Marston. It was almost as lovely as she was—innocent and sweet, with tender, trusting blue eyes; it gave one a pleasant feeling about the heart. Bright, eager, and beautiful, I made up my mind again that she was exactly the wife for a good, honest young fellow like Jim, and that I would indulge myself in the pleasure of furthering their little romance to the best of my ability. It isn't so often in these days that

you see a perfectly suitable match being thwarted by a feud. It harks back to the days of romance.

I lamented that Julia would not be in the secret. She has a tender heart and would have enjoyed it.

Jim was almost reconciled to a week's separation as he looked at the picture. This was something that he could have hourly. I think that for the first day or two he hunted up the secluded spots where he and Mary had strolled and assured each other of undying affection, and sat down under a tree and gazed at the face of his sweetheart all day long. His trousers bore that appearance when he came home to dinner, and his ravenous appetite made one wonder as to his lunch.

Johnny recovered from his cholera, but two days later Aunt Sarah and Uncle John came for a night and brought two young girls with them. Julia slept in the nursery, and I turned in with Jim.

In the middle of the night there was a peremptory ring at the door, and a messenger boy stood there with a telegram for Jim, telling him that his father had been seriously injured by a fall from his horse. There were just twelve minutes in which to catch the train, and we got him off:

As I drove out of the gate the next morning, I missed the bright young fellow who usually sat beside me, and made up my mind that I would find a salary for him in my own factory, and keep him until his father relented. There would be hundreds of thousands under his control sooner or later.

Just as I passed my gate I saw my young son, aged six, and Cecil Marston, interestedly examining a silver dollar.

"It's a trade dollar," Cecil was saying, "and ain't worth so much as a real one, but you can have the rabbit for it. There ain't anything mean about me."

I felt like stopping Johnny to ask him where he got his dollar, trade or otherwise, and then I remembered that he had one or two trade dollars in his bank. It was against the rules for him to spend his bank money, but his mother attended to the discipline of the family, and I had a sneaking dislike to getting Johnny into a scrape; besides, there was a directors' meeting in my office that morning and Betty B. had already carried me far down the shady village street.

At the factory I found a telegram from Jim on my table:

Left dollar under pillow. Send.

JIM.

As soon as I could get away from that meeting I sent Betty speeding home. I couldn't have Jim's picture of Mary Marston lying about loose, yet how in the mischief was I going to find it?

I had intended going in the back way, where I should usually have encountered Alice, the maid who arranged the bedrooms, but instead, Julia came out to the *porte cochère* to meet me.

"Dick," she said, "there was a man here this morning who says he has a perfect match for Betty B. He saw her somewhere the other day and asked whose horse she was, and he says he'll buy her, or sell you his horse, if he can arrange it. Now, here's just the opportunity. You know you told me

that when you could find a match for Betty I might have them for carriage horses."

I was anxious to find a match for Betty B., and the chance of it put everything else out of my head. I told Julia to ask the man to bring the horse—he had said that he would call the next day—and if it was all right we would buy it.

The next morning I asked Alice if she had found a coin under my pillow the morning after Mr. Reynolds went away. She was an honest and pretty country girl, and the color of deepest embarrassment went all over her face. She said yes, and went hastily out of the room, coming back presently with a new silver dollar. I discovered in an instant that she supposed it had been left there as a tip, and I had another in my hand to give her.

"But this is not the one," I said. "The one I want was valuable as a—rare coin. It was a trade dollar."

Just then Julia came in at the window. She had been standing out on the balcony watering her nasturtiums.

"What is it?" she asked, looking at Alice.

The girl was almost in tears, and I wanted to get away as speedily as possible.

"Only that Jim left a tip for Alice, and by mistake I gave her a pocket piece, a trade dollar, and I wanted to get it back again."

Julia didn't approve of tipping the servants, and she was annoyed at once.

"That trade dollar? I think Alice let me have it in some change."

Cold chills went over me. What an idiot I had been to claim that coin as my own! She would certainly discover that it was not a genuine piece of money, and then what explanation was I to make?

"It was under his pillow," Alice began, not seeing that she was exonerated.

Julia looked a bit contemptuous. I knew she was thinking that it was very vulgar for a gentleman to leave tips for female servants under his pillow.

"Come to think," said Julia, "I gave that dollar to Johnny at once. He said he knew a boy who had a rabbit he could buy for a dollar."

Cecil Marston! I must write a note to Mary, explain the circumstances, and have her get the coin back from her beggarly little brother. I was glad it had gone as it had. At any rate it had left my hands, and I had by my general stupidity just escaped a mess. I sat down at my desk and wrote the note. It was as polite and formal as possible, merely explaining the circumstances. After it was finished I called Mike, the gardener, to come and carry it; and then I changed my mind. I had barely escaped one scrape. I wouldn't put myself anywhere near another. There was a messenger boy at the Salaville office. I would send him. He was a stupid looking, loutish boy, who was just going out as I went in, but they told me he would be back, and my note would go in an hour.

Then I went to the factory with a clear conscience—my whole duty done.

I had been at the factory office two or three hours, when there was a jangling ring at my telephone, and Julia's voice, at a pitch I seldom heard, bade me very peremptorily to come home.

I am fond of my children, and my first thought was of Johnny's daring attempts at gymnastics, or the baby—little Dolly—of whom I am fonder than anybody on earth. I asked at once what the matter was, but the connection had been rung off. Julia must have been excited.

I put Betty B. through her best paces, and she fairly spun me over the three miles to the house. As I came up the drive I saw the cause of Julia's anxiety standing at the door. It was the replica of Betty B. A more perfect match I never saw in my life. An impulse of thankfulness took with it the first annoyance at having been put through twenty minutes of keen anxiety so unnecessarily.

I looked over the two animals, and made up my mind that Julia should have her carriage horses, if the man would take anything like a reasonable price for Betty B.'s twin, and then went leisurely into the house.

I found Julia in the parlor alone, fairly quivering with excitement of some sort.

"They *are* a match," I began—"but what is the matter, my dear?"

"Will you be good enough to tell me," she said, "with what young woman you have been driving about the country the past two weeks?"

"Young woman?" I said stupidly. "Driving about the country with a young woman? Julia, are you crazy? I never drove about the country with a young woman in my life."

"Thank you! I may not have been as young as Mary Marston when I was fool enough to marry you, but I——"

"Julia," I said, "in heaven's name, what are you talking about? You know I haven't been driving with anybody. I've been at the factory these two weeks, as you know perfectly well."

And then a dreadful suspicion struck me. It had been very hot weather; could it be possible that there was anything wrong with my wife's reason?

"Aren't you well, Julia?" I asked.

"Well! I am perfectly well, thank you," with tremendous sarcasm. "But I should like to have you explain how the man who owns that horse out there came to know it would match Betty B. You may tell me untruths day after day, and I may be stupid enough to believe you, but there is such a thing as circumstantial evidence. This man says that he has seen you pass his place, seven miles in the country, with a young lady, who he says he thought was your—*wife*."

"He's a liar!" said I.

"He sees you so often that he comes to know every point of the horse, and brings an exact match for her in here!" There was triumph and bitterness in Julia's tones. She was too angry for the triumph not to be on top. "He says the lady wore a black hat with red flowers and a white gown. I have seen Mary Marston go down the street every morning, immediately after you left, and now I know where she has gone. I am going home to my mother!" And there was a prelude to hysterics given out on the air.

Oh, Jim! I was just on the point of giving him up—for no young fellow has a right to get a married man into such a scrape as this—when the door opened and Julia's younger sister, Maude, came in.

Maude is a cool and cynical young woman, very much end of the century. I couldn't tell Jim's love affair to her. I could prove in course of time that I was not the man who had been driving Mary Marston about the country in a conspicuous costume. I put my hands in my pockets and settled back with an air of virtuous innocence.

"What's the matter here? You and Dick having a shindy? What on earth is wrong? Have you kissed the cook, Dick? Won't you let her have a new parlor carpet?"

"Oh, no," I said with great calmness. "I've been riding about the country with Mary Marston, and Julia's objecting."

"Well, I'll congratulate you on your good taste. You couldn't find a prettier girl. I'm sure if I were a man I couldn't live opposite Mary for two weeks and not ask her to go driving, but I didn't think you had the briskness to do it."

"Oh, you may joke," poor Julia said, but I saw there was a glimmer of hope that it was a joke.

Our house is an old fashioned one, with windows opening to the ground. Julia turned towards one of them, mopping her eyes, and at that instant that infernal messenger boy stepped on the lawn directly in front of her and held out a note.

"Miss Marston said for me to give this to Mr. Winthrop, and will you sign it?"

Julia took the note, and turned around, perfectly pallid, holding in her hand a tiny square of palest azure, the conventional young lady's note.

I got up and held out my hand for it. Maude looked at us both and gave a low and expressive whistle.

"No!" said Julia; and she tore the letter open.

It had grown to deadly earnest now. I should have to tell on Jim. The note would do it if I did not.

"If I must tell you," I began—

"Maude, listen to this:

"MY DEAR MR. WINTHROP:

"Thank you so much for the *warning*! I have something *delightful* to tell you, and will try to see you during the morning. I see Betty B. has a match. I could not enjoy two more than I have the one.

"Yours so truly,

"MARY MARSTON."

Maude reached out her hand for the note.

"Well, Dick, my boy, you have been going it, rather. You ought to have her educated past sending notes to the house. I can't really blame Julia this time. I think you're rather a brute." And she looked at me with mild contempt.

There were no tears for Julia now. She had risen in the might and dignity of her womanhood. She was showing at last the real fine grain that I

loved in her. When it comes to a supreme moment, I pity that man who does not admire his wife. She may have all the small faults that may cause him to writhe, but the unpardonable sin is commonplaceness.

I walked over to her.

"Julia," I said, "this is all a mistake. It is something that I ought to have told you long ago, but I promised——"

There was a stamp of angry feet on the piazza, and a rush and a sobbing howl. Then Johnny threw himself at his mother, something clutched tight in his hand, which he pressed into his mother's.

"Cis Marston says this ain't a good dollar. He says they won't take it at the store. He's brought it back, and says he's goin' to take the rabbit."

Julia was perfectly calm and collected by this time. She looked at the coin and held it out almost gently.

"Is it your pocket piece—your trade dollar?"

Maude gave a real laugh.

"His pocket piece? Oh, Julia, that's a locket. I've seen those things before. The plot thickens. Press on the E in the word 'States,' Julia. Let's see the fun out!"

"Julia," I cried, "before you touch that thing, I *demand* that you listen to me. I would have told you before had not Maude been sitting here." That imperturbable young woman merely smiled up in my face. "It was not I who was out riding with Mary Marston, but some one else to whom I lent my horse."

"Press on the E in the word 'States,' Julia," said Maude.

"It was found under your pillow, however," Julia said, her finger hunting the spring.

"You shall *not* open it until you hear me!"

I sprang for it, and the thin silver lid flew up, showing Mary Marston's pretty face.

Maude was leaning over Julia's shoulder, and she looked up at me.

Sometimes in this world, just about as often as a man gets all the trumps on a whist deal, the opportunely saving event arrives precisely on the moment. The disaster can always come. It never seems to require any complicated machinery, but the delicate mechanism of a deliverance almost always fails to work. It looks like special providence when it does come.

There was a rush in at the window, and Jim Reynolds, young and radiant, with his arm actually about Mary Marston's waist, swept her into the room.

"Congratulate us! The row is over!" Jim simply shouted. "The governors are as thick as thieves again, and we're going to get married next month!"

Mary was laughing, but a little shy. Her eye lighted upon her picture in Julia's hand, and she seized upon it as something diverting.

"Oh, you have found it, have you? I haven't been able to catch that boy Cecil all morning. I am simply furious with Jim for leaving it about as tips for maids."

Phillips McClure.

THE BUNKEL MYSTERY.*

How the robbery of the rival banks became a matter of strange coincidences—Far reaching and totally unexpected results of an act of gallantry.—The battles on Bunkel Island, and the frustrating of carefully laid plans.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

MR. SINGERLAY and Mr. Barkpool are the two wealthiest citizens of Montoban. The former is proprietor of the Montoban Mill, and president of the Montoban Bank; the latter owns the Onongo Mill, and presides over the Onongo Bank. They have long been enemies, and their quarrel is shared by their sons, Dolph Singerlay and Phin Barkpool, but both the latter are beset by the same desire: to have a steamer of his own on the lake. Andy Lamb is the son of Mr. Barkpool's engineer, and he rescues Diana Singerlay from the persecutions of Tom Sawder, a young hoodlum. He sails her boat to the Singerlay home for her, and in passing through the grounds of the rival magnate afterwards, he overhears that gentleman in altercation with his son. Not caring to be seen as though he were trespassing when the owner of the property is in this mood, Andy steps behind a tree, where he is perforce a listener to the high words. Dolph is pleading with his father to buy him a steamer, and on the magnate declaring that the other would not know how to manage the engine, Dolph replies that he can get Andy Lamb to do it, whereupon Mr. Singerlay exclaims:

"Do you think I would trust my son in the hands of one of Barkpool's satellites?"

At this inopportune moment Andy sneezes violently, is discovered by Mr. Singerlay, and dragged by him into the house.

CHAPTER VIII—A QUARREL BETWEEN FATHER AND SON.

ANDY LAMB was not a little astonished at this warm reception on his first visit to the residence of Mr. Singerlay. He now saw that he had made a mistake in concealing himself, though he had only stepped behind the tree to allow the magnate and his son to pass.

The prisoner felt capable of making a very respectable resistance to the operations of the magnate; but after his pleasant relations with the daughter, he did not feel like fighting with the father. Besides, his captor did not hurt him; he had only taken him by the collar, and as long as he did not resist, he was not damaged in the slightest degree.

Besides, he was sure that as soon as Di told the story of the adventure on the lake, the scale would be turned, and he was even tempted to believe that he might be treated with consideration. He was not too modest to believe that he had rendered an important service to the daughter.

"I've got the rascal that has been stealing the strawberries!" exclaimed Mr. Singerlay, when he stopped at the side door of the mansion to take the latch key from his pocket. "Go and see if you can find a policeman, Dolph."

"Why, that's Andy Lamb!" ejaculated the son, who for the first time saw the prisoner's face when his father halted.

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"I don't care who he is; he has been stealing the strawberries," replied the father.

"I have not touched your strawberries, Mr. Singerlay; and I did not even know that you had any," Andy ventured to say in the mildest of tones.

"Do you think a man would have a place like mine without having strawberries on it?" demanded the magnate; and the remark seemed to be a new grievance to him.

"I meant only to say that I have no personal knowledge of your strawberry bed," added Andy.

"What are you doing on my grounds, then?" demanded the owner of the Montoban mill.

"I landed from a boat and was on my way home."

Mr. Singerlay opened the side door, and conducted his prisoner to his office, which was a large apartment where he sometimes attended to the varied details of his business. As soon as they were in the room, he released Andy, and proceeded to look him in the face as though he intended to overawe him, and thus bring out the signs of his guilt.

Andy did not overawe worth a cent. He had done nothing wrong, and he held up his head like a man. The magnate looked at his face, and examined his hands; but he could not find a single red stain upon him. Dolph appeared to have his reasons for conciliating the prisoner, and he spoke in his favor.

"Whether you stole my strawberries or not, you are a trespasser on my grounds, and if ever I catch you on my property again, I will prosecute you," continued Mr. Singerlay. "You can go now."

Andy's self respect did not permit him to make any reply to this unpleasant speech, and he left the office. He was not even tempted to change the current which had set against him by alluding to the event on the lake, for he felt that he had been very shabbily treated. The office opened into an entry, on one side of which was the door leading out of the house.

When he came to the door he found he could not open it. He was a machinist by nature, and while he was looking to see why he could not get out, the father and son in the office resumed the conversation which had been interrupted by Andy's unfortunate sneeze. The involuntary visitor had no intention of listening to it, but he could not open the door.

"I must have the money, father," said Dolph, very decidedly.

"Not a dollar for a steamer!" exclaimed the magnate, in the most uncompromising tone.

"I have got a big idea in my head, father," persisted Dolph. "I mean business."

"Nonsense! There is no more business in your head than in a sick mule's," added the father, though he now seemed to be in better humor than he had been a moment before.

"In a dry time you run the mill at a loss because it costs so much to haul coal over the hills," persisted the son. "With a steamer on the lake and two or three barges——"

Andy did not think it was the right thing for him to play the listener, and

he returned as far as the door of the office. He had satisfied himself that the outside door was locked, and that the key had been taken away.

"I told you to go, you young rascal!" cried the magnate, when he saw the visitor at the door.

"The door is locked, and I cannot get out," answered Andy, humbly enough.

Mr. Singerlay did not explain the matter, but he had locked the door when he came in, and put the key in his pocket, for he thought his prisoner might try to escape. He had forgotten it. Now, without any explanation, he unlocked the door, and permitted Andy to retire.

"I don't want to hear another word about a steamer, Dolph," said Mr. Singerlay, as he returned to the office. "I am sure you would get blown up if you had one, and your mother would worry all the time about you."

"You seem to think I am a baby, father, but I am not. I am sixteen year old, and that was the age of Charles XII when he took command of the army of Sweden," replied Dolph, throwing back his head as though he felt that he was somebody.

"All right, Dolph the first; but could Charles XII run a steamer? That is the question before us now. If you want to take charge of an army, I have no objection, only I shall not find the army," chuckled the magnate, who sometimes tried to be funny.

"You needn't make game of me, governor. I am going to have the steamer, whether or no! If you don't give me the money I shall get it in some other way," growled the hopeful son, who was a spoiled child, for he was looked upon by the magnate as his successor. "I'll let you know that I am not a baby."

"None of your impudence, Dolph! If you don't behave yourself, I'll put you to bed without your supper. So you want to go into the coal business with your steamer?"

"I was going to put you in the way of getting ahead of Barkpool, but I won't say another word about it until you give me the money for the steamer," replied the son saucily.

"Then you will hold your tongue until you are gray. You are an impudent puppy! Before I give you a steamer or anything else, I shall teach you better manners to your father," replied Mr. Singerlay angrily. "You treat me as though I were a boy like yourself."

"And you treat me as though I were a baby," added Dolph, in no better temper than his father.

"I have simply refused to give you the money to buy a steamer, because it would be a dangerous plaything in the hands of a boy; and I shall stick to what I have said."

"In the hands of a boy!" exclaimed Dolph, starting up from his chair in a violent passion. "I am not a baby!"

"No, you are not exactly a baby; as you say you are like Charles XII, a boy of sixteen."

"I shall prove to you that I am a man! I am not a baby! I shall have the steamer."

"Where will you get the money to buy it?" asked the injudicious parent in a sneering tone.

"I'll borrow it of Barkpool, if I can't get it in any other way."

"Do you mean to insult your father?" demanded the magnate, stung to the quick at the hinted treason of his son.

"You won't hear me when I want to talk business; and if you won't, Barkpool will," replied Dolph bitterly, as he rushed out of the house.

His father was too angry to follow him.

CHAPTER IX.—A RUPTURE WITH THE HOUSE OF BARKPOOL.

ANDY LAMB was glad to get out of the house of Mr. Singerlay, for he felt that he had been abused. But he was confident that the magnate would come to his senses when he had heard Di's story, and he was willing to wait for the future to set him right. He had overheard a part of the quarrel between the father and son, and it had given him an idea, or rather revived an old one.

Dolph had an idea, he had discovered, and it was the same as his own. The magnate's son had spoken of a steamer on the lake and two or three barges. At that point Andy had interrupted the conversation, for he did not care to have it said in the future, if his idea should ever be carried out, that he had borrowed it from Dolph. But what he had heard showed him that it was time for him to be at work on his idea, or the other faction would get ahead of him.

There was a great trunk line railroad about five miles south of Montoban, and another twelve miles north of it, running close to the shore of the lake. Stages connected with the railroad trains, and all the merchandise and material had to be carted over the road. No one appeared to have thought of a connection by water with the northern railroad.

In spite of what he had heard Dolph say, Andy was confident that no one had considered his idea; and he had not spoken of it, even to his father. It was time that something was done, though Dolph had failed to obtain a hearing from his father on the subject.

Andy thought he had better see Phin Barkpool, when he came ashore, and he walked across the town to Rockrib Creek, at the mouth of which the Milly, Phin's sloop, named after his sister, was usually moored. This creek ran parallel to the Onongo River, and less than a mile from it. Near the mill of Mr. Barkpool, it was less than a quarter of a mile from the river.

In order to injure the owner of the other mill as much as possible, Mr. Barkpool had made a channel from his water wheel to Rockrib Creek, so that all the water used was diverted from the river, and so much power was taken from the lower privilege. Whether or not it was lawful for him to divert this water was a question the courts had not yet decided. This was one of the lower magnate's greatest grievances.

Andy reached the mouth of the creek just as Phin was mooring his boat. He seated himself on the shore to wait for him. In a few minutes the skipper of the Milly came on shore. He could not help seeing his late companion

in the boat, but he resolutely looked away from him, refusing to notice him.

Andy was rather astonished at this conduct on the part of Phin. He realized then that he had offended him by his course in the boat. Though he felt that he had done his duty in going to the assistance of Di Singerlay, he was willing to explain his views to his angry associate.

"I say, Phin!" called Andy, as the other walked away from him.

"What do you want, Andy Lamb?" demanded Phin, hardly looking back at him.

"I want to see you," replied Andy, quickening his pace so that he was at the side of the other in a moment. "Are you put out with me?"

"Put out with you!" exclaimed Phin. "After the way you have treated me, I don't think you need to ask me such a question. Of course I am put out with you, and I won't have anything more to do with you."

"Well, if that is so, I don't know that I can help myself," added Andy, really sorry to find that the breach was so serious.

"What do you expect of me? If I let you sail with me, I expect you to do as I say," said Phin, a little more pliantly.

"If you let me sail with you, Phin!" exclaimed Andy, utterly confounded at this cool interpretation of his presence on board of the Milly. "Why, you asked me to go with you, and show you how to sail your boat better than you had been able to sail her before. I went to oblige you, though I had something else to do."

"I suppose you will say that I went down on my knees and begged you to go with me," sneered Phin.

"I don't say that; but you certainly asked me to go with you."

"No matter if I did; I expected you to do as I said."

"Didn't I do as you said?"

"No, you didn't! I told you not to meddle with that girl; and then you deserted me to look out for her—Singerlay's daughter, too!"

"Tom Sawder had taken her boat away from her, and insulted her. I thought I ought to do something to save her from harm, and I did it," replied Andy firmly.

"Then you don't mean to beg my pardon for what you did?" demanded Phin.

"I certainly do not, for I did what I thought was right, and I can't apologize for it."

"All right, Andy Lamb; if you can get along without me, I think I can get along without you," said Phin, as he resumed his walk.

"I don't want to have any ill feeling about it, Phin," added Andy.

"Then beg my pardon for deserting me and going over to the enemy!" said Phin, stopping again.

"I cannot do that, for I am guilty of no wrong."

"Then don't come near me again!"

Andy stopped where he was, unwilling to humiliate himself to any greater extent. He stood in the road watching the retreating form of his late associate, for he had never regarded him as his friend. Phin was not so arbitrary

and domineering as Dolph, though he sometimes made himself disagreeable by his assumption. He seemed to be always conscious that he was "the son of his father."

Instead of obtaining an interview with Mr. Barkpool through his son, as he had decided to do, in order to explain his plan of transportation, Andy found himself at swords' points with both of the magnates. But he was on the best of terms with his own father, who always treated him more as a younger brother than a son, and he hastened home in order to take his advice.

If his father told him to beg the young magnate's pardon, he thought he might be able to do it. But Morgan Lamb, though he was mild and conciliatory in his manner, had a reasonable share of self respect and independence. He had formerly been an engineer on a Hudson River steamer, and had left this occupation to work at his trade as a mechanic, so that he could be with his family more of the time.

Mr. Lamb had been sent with others to put up the machinery in the Onongo mill, and then he had been engaged as engineer, and as machinist when the engine was not in operation. He lived in a cottage built for him by his employer near the division line, and half way between the two mills.

It was nearly sundown, and before Andy had gone half the distance to his home, he met his father, who was going to the town.

"What is the matter with Phin Barkpool, Andy?" asked Mr. Lamb. "He would not speak to me, and hardly looked at me when I passed him just now. He always used to be civil to me."

"Phin has fallen out with me, father," replied Andy, looking into his father's face to note the effect of the disclosure.

"Not through any fault of yours, I hope, my son," added the machinist, stopping short in the road with astonishment. He had resumed his walk with Andy at his side.

"I will leave you to judge whether it is my fault or not, father," replied Andy; and he proceeded to relate in full detail all that had occurred on the lake, with the interview at Rockrib Creek.

It was a long story, and when it was finished they had reached the cottage on their return.

CHAPTER X.—THE TERRIBLE EXPLOSION IN ONONGO RIVER.

To people having business or labor connections with either of the magnates, a rupture was a matter of no trifling consequence, as it involved the loss of employment or trade. Mr. Lamb was duly impressed by the narrative of his son, and he asked him a great many questions. At last he was satisfied that he fully comprehended the whole affair.

"If I have done wrong, father, I am willing to apologize to Phin, though it would go against the grain to do so," said Andy, when he had answered the last question.

"You have not done wrong, Andy, and you shall not make an apology with my consent," replied Mr. Lamb, as he took his son's hand and shook

it heartily. "You have done just as I should in your place, and I am proud of your conduct, especially in running down that boat after Tom Sawder had missed your head by only a foot with his last shot. Why, the young villain is a pirate, and I will see that he is taken care of, if no one else does it."

"I was afraid he would load up his two revolvers again, and fire better the next time," added Andy.

"But I think Mr. Barkpool must be more reasonable than his son, and we had better go over and see him at once," continued the machinist. "We will go directly after supper, and then we shall find him at home."

On their arrival at the palatial residence of the magnate, they found him smoking his cigar in his office. The machinist and his son took a respectful attitude before the autocrat; but they saw that a change had come over him, for he had always treated them kindly, as he treated all, except when he intended to "grind" them.

"My boy has had a little difficulty with Mr. Phineas," Mr. Lamb began in the most conciliatory manner.

"Your boy has behaved very badly, Lamb," replied Mr. Barkpool, with a frown on his brow.

"I am sorry you think so, sir," added the machinist. "Perhaps you have not got all the facts about the affair."

"Do you mean to say that my son has lied to me about it?" demanded the magnate, rising from his chair in his wrath, for it was plain enough that he intended to be angry when the time came for a demonstration.

"I didn't know but you might like to hear both sides of the question, as you have now heard one side," suggested Mr. Lamb in the mildest possible tone.

"There is only one side to this question, and I have heard that from my son," answered Mr. Barkpool, evidently meaning that his decision should be final.

"Andy is here, and perhaps you would like to ask him some questions, sir," suggested the machinist.

"Do you want me to believe that Phineas is a liar?"

"If you should bring them both together, very likely——"

"I will not bring them together, for I will not admit that my son could have given me false information. There are only two points to be settled: did Andy desert my son? Did he desert him for the purpose of going to the assistance of that girl—I mean Singerlay's daughter?" demanded Mr. Barkpool, looking the machinist sharply in the face.

"Andy certainly left your son——"

"I say deserted him!" interposed the magnate, fanning the flame of his anger.

"I say that Andy left your son," repeated Mr. Lamb; and his eye was beginning to sparkle a little.

"Say deserted him, Lamb!" stormed the angry mill owner.

"I will not say that, for he did not desert him," added the workman mildly, but firmly.

"I say he did desert him!"

"You can call it what you please ; and I shall do the same. Andy did leave your son, as he had a perfect right to do."

"He had no right to desert my son, and it was mean and treacherous for him to do so ; and in upholding your son, you are as guilty as he is !" retorted the furious magnate.

"We differ in regard to the quality of my son's action, and I most heartily uphold him in leaving Mr. Phineas under the circumstances," continued Mr. Lamb. "On the second point, Andy did leave Phineas to go to the assistance of Miss Singerlay."

"Miss Singerlay !" exclaimed the mill owner, in the most contemptuous manner, for it went against his grain even to hear the daughter of his rival spoken of in respectful tones. "She is Singerlay's daughter, and that was reason enough why Andy should not go near her. You cannot serve God and the devil both."

"That is very true, sir ; and for that reason I shall serve God," replied the machinist, bowing his head as though he had made a point.

Mr. Barkpool boiled over with rage as this remark pricked him, and he darted off to the other end of the room in the effort to contain himself. But he immediately returned, and placed himself in front of the workman, who had pluck enough to speak his own mind.

"You can't serve Singerlay and me at the same time ! That is what I mean," gasped the enraged speaker.

"That is what I supposed you meant ; but which is God and which is the devil ?" asked Mr. Lamb, as cool as a man could be, for he had put his anger behind him.

"You are insolent, Lamb !"

"If I am insolent, what are you, Barkpool ?"

"Phineas ordered Andy not to leave him," said the magnate, when he found that the machinist could use as strong language as he could himself.

"He did ; and I am glad that Andy had the spirit to disregard him. There was a young lady in the hands of a miscreant, who took her boat away from her and insulted her. When she called for help, your son was a coward, mean and contemptible, that he did not heed her call," said Mr. Lamb, in a slow and emphatic manner. "I am proud of Andy because he did not heed Phineas' order, and went to the assistance of the young lady in spite of him. I am thankful that he did not ask whose daughter she was ; and I hope when your daughter is in danger of insult and outrage, she will find a champion who will do the same without asking who her father is."

Mr. Lamb concluded his rather long speech, and the magnate did not immediately make any reply. In fact, he seemed to be overwhelmed by the argument of the honest machinist, especially in its reference to his own child.

"I see that it is no use to talk any more about this matter, Mr. Barkpool ; and Andy and I will retire before we are kicked out of the house," said Mr. Lamb.

"I discharge you from my employ, and you will move out of my house at once !" growled the mill owner, choking for utterance ; for it had been many

a year since he had listened to any such plain speech applied to himself. "Do you understand me, Lamb?"

"I understand you perfectly, Barkpool, and of course I expected this. Now, I want you to understand, Barkpool, that I have got a soul, and that my soul belongs to me. Come, Andy, my boy, shake the dust off your feet, and let us go home."

Mr. Barkpool was too much confounded by the boldness and plain speech of the mechanic to say another word. He was quivering with rage, for he had found that the engineer was a man, and not a thing. It was a new revelation to him. He meant to be kind and condescending to his employees because they were his inferiors, not because they were human beings like himself.

"You have lost your place, father," said Andy, as soon as they were out of the house.

"But I have not lost my manliness nor my self respect; and that is a good deal better," replied the engineer. "These two mill owners think they are a couple of gods, before whom we should all bow down; and I am willing to do so within reasonable limits, but not at the sacrifice of my soul and conscience. I have got money enough to live on till I get another situation. We are all right, Andy; do your duty as you understand it, and you will come out right in the end, though you may get some hard knocks for it."

He had hardly finished the sentence before a tremendous explosion shook the very ground on which they stood. They were standing on the bank of the river, just below the upper dam, in the darkness, for they had taken the path from the house to the road. Both of them stepped back, for it seemed as though they were going to be pitched into the stream.

For an instant the scene was lighted up, and Andy and his father, as they turned, saw that it was the dam in which the explosion centered. The structure was torn into fragments for half the width of the river on the farther side, and vast quantities of water, as well as pieces of timber and planks, with stones and earth, were scattered in every direction.

The upper dam had been blown up with powder or some other explosive. The pent up waters rushed with tremendous velocity down the narrow gorge of the stream, carrying with it the wreck of the dam. It was a terrible sight, and father and son gazed with awe upon it. In a few minutes it was followed by another crash down the river, and Mr. Lamb said the lower dam had been carried away by the rush of waters. He was right.

CHAPTER XI.—GREAT EXCITEMENT IN MONTBAN.

THE explosion must have shaken the country for miles around. To Morgan Lamb and his son, who were standing on the bank of the river and but a short distance from it, it had the effect of an earthquake. The flash and glare first attracted their attention, and the sudden illumination was instantly followed by the terrific report and the shaking of the earth beneath them. Then came the crash of waters, and the heavy roaring, which did not cease for half an hour.

"The dam has broken away!" exclaimed Andy, who was the first to speak after the tremendous flash and crash.

"Fire and flash do not come out of water unless it has some help," replied the machinist, as he led the way into the main road. "The dam has been blown up."

"What could blow it up?" asked Andy, who followed his father, who deemed it wise to place himself and his son at a greater distance from the scene of the catastrophe.

"It did not blow itself up, and either powder or dynamite has been at the bottom of it. This is the work of some enemy of Mr. Barkpool, and it is just what might be expected at any time while this senseless quarrel lasts," said Mr. Lamb, as he heard excited voices behind him.

"How could any one put powder or dynamite where it would blow up the dam?" inquired Andy, who wanted to know how the thing had been done.

"Very easily, my son. On the other side of the river, the formation of the shore will allow a person to pass under the sheet of the water that pours over the dam," the machinist explained. "The fall is high on this side, and one can walk under it half way across the stream."

"I never heard there was any such place there," added Andy.

"Mr. Barkpool sent me to examine the dam about a year ago, and I discovered the opening. I reported it, but he told me not to mention it, for people would certainly wish to visit the place, and he thought it was dangerous. He was sure Phin would be into it if he knew of it. The powder was no doubt placed under the falling sheet of water, and discharged with a slow match, or something of that sort."

"Then others must have known of this thing."

"Some one else must have discovered it."

Mr. Lamb and Andy walked at a rapid pace, while the roaring of the river compelled them to speak in a loud tone in order to be heard above it. They reached the cottage without seeing any person, for those who had been startled by the explosion all ran to the dam. Those who heard the collapse of the lower dam doubtless hastened in that direction. Mrs. Lamb had heard the crash and the roaring of the waters in the river, and had gone out of the house into the darkness to ascertain what had happened, and was at the front gate when her husband and son arrived.

Mr. Lamb explained the matter to her, and they went into the house. At first she thought it was an earthquake, and then a peal of thunder; but the roaring she could not account for. As soon as they were in the house, she took a letter from the mantel, and handed it to Andy.

"What's this, mother?" he asked, for he was not much in the habit of receiving letters.

"I don't know what it is; I haven't opened it. You had not been gone five minutes before a man came to the door, and asked for you. When I told him you were not at home, he left that letter," replied Mrs. Lamb.

"I wonder whom it's from," added Andy, looking at the address.

"You can tell by opening it," said his mother, with a smile.

"Ah, here is the address of Percival Singerlay on the envelope!" ex-

claimed Andy. "This is from Di. I suppose she thinks she did not thank me enough for helping her."

Andy opened the letter, and found that it was not from the fair skipper, but from her father. The magnate of Montoban said he was actually sorry for what had happened, and wished him to call at the house as soon as he possibly could. Andy read it, and then passed it to his father. Then his mother looked at it.

"Shall I go, father?" asked Andy.

"Certainly; go at once, my son," replied the machinist, without any hesitation. "That is a friendly letter."

"I don't want to curry favor with him," said Andy.

"He seems to be genuinely sorry for having treated you the way he did, and you were too proud to explain how you happened to be on his grounds after he had accused you of stealing his strawberries. He sends for you, and I do not think that you will demean yourself at all by going to see him," replied the father.

"I wish you could go with me, father," suggested Andy.

Mr. Lamb considered a moment, and then said he would do so. Mrs. Lamb would go with them a part of the way, and call upon a friend. In the road they found a great many people on foot and in vehicles, hastening to the Onongo Mill to ascertain what had happened there.

The machinist informed those who asked for information that the upper dam had been blown up, and his supposition that the lower one had been carried away by the sudden rush of the immense volume of water, was confirmed. The whole town was out of doors, and great excitement prevailed. The news that the upper dam had been blown up was brought by the machinist, and it did not tend to allay the uproar. The whole of the lower town appeared to be gathered on the bank of the river.

Andy and his father did not find the magnate at home, or even any of his family, for they had all gone out to see the havoc of the waters. Even the servants were not in the house. They went to the shore, where a large fire had been built to throw its light on the dashing stream. But there was nothing to be seen, for the water had done its work; the dam had been carried away, and only the wreck of it remained.

But the furious flow of the water was subsiding as the pressure was reduced from above, and the people soon returned to their homes when there was nothing more to be seen. Just above the dam was a bridge; but fortunately it had been built high enough to be out of the reach of the rushing tide, and it had not been carried away. It was crowded with people, looking at the dashing water.

As the inhabitants left the scene, all of them were talking about the event, and asking who had blown up the Onongo dam. It could not have been an enemy of Mr. Singerlay, for the deed had been done at the the upper dam; but it was evident that the villain, whoever he was, had done more than he intended, for both dams had been destroyed.

Andy and his father returned to the mansion of the magnate, but he had not arrived, though they found Dolph in the house. He had just come in,

and he seemed to be out of breath. His clothes were wet and covered with yellow mud, and he was certainly in a very bad plight.

"Your father has not yet come in, has he?" asked Mr. Lamb, as he met Dolph in the hall.

"Not yet; but he will be in before long," replied Dolph, so exhausted that he could with difficulty utter the words.

"You look as though you had had a hard time of it, Dolph," added Andy, looking him over.

"I went down to look out for my boat, and a big wave dashed up on the shore and threw me down," answered the rich man's son.

"Were the boats carried away?" asked Andy.

"No, they both held on; but I thought the Dragon would be stove against the shore. That is, they were both there—I think they are all right," stammered Dolph, who did not seem to be quite sure about the boats. "I must go and put on some dry clothes, for I am wet to the skin."

He went up the stairs, evidently in a hurry when he saw his father come in at the front door. Mr. Singerlay did not seem to be at all depressed by the loss of the dam, and welcomed Andy.

CHAPTER XII.—THE INTERVIEW WITH THE MAGNATE.

"I AM glad to see you, Andy Lamb; and if you had only told me how you happened to be in my grounds, it would have been all right," said Mr. Singerlay, as he gave his hand to the young man. "I am very sorry I was so rude to you, and I apologize for it. I am glad to see you, Mr. Lamb, for I believe you are the father of Andy."

It was certainly very magnanimous on the part of the mighty magnate of Montoban to apologize to a boy like Andy, for, unlike Dolph, he believed that a young fellow of sixteen was still a boy, and he was so embarrassed that he could hardly say a word.

"It is all right, sir; and it is my fault that I did not explain how I happened to be in your grounds," replied Andy.

"Di cried like a baby when she learned what had happened, and I promised to make it right with you, if I could," continued Mr. Singerlay, as he invited his guests to be seated. "Andy, Di thinks you are the greatest man in Montoban, and I am inclined to think that she is more than half right. You were a brave young fellow to stand up against a pair of revolvers in the hands of a desperate young vagabond."

"I dodged down into the bottom of the boat, and there was not much danger, sir, when Tom Sawder did the shooting," said Andy.

"No matter what you did; it was plucky and you deserve a gold medal," added the magnate with enthusiasm, and Andy found it difficult to believe that the speaker was the same gentleman who had dragged him into the house by the collar a couple of hours before.

While they were talking, Di and her mother came in.

"It's all right, Di," exclaimed her father. "Andy has forgiven me for my bad behavior."

"I am glad to see you again, Andy, and I was sorry that anything unpleasant happened on your way from the boat house," said Di, with a gush which overwhelmed the modest champion.

"No matter about that, Miss Singerlay; it is all right now, and if you please, we won't say another word about it," replied Andy. "I am very glad I was able to be of some service to you."

"But you had to fight for it, and I see that you have some of the scars of battle on your face now, Andy," interposed the magnate. "It is marvelous to me that you were able to hold your own against that bruiser, for the policemen say he is an ugly customer."

"I had something better to fight for than he had," replied Andy, glancing involuntarily at Di.

"I have got out a warrant for the arrest of the four vagabonds who made the second attack, and three of them have been arrested. They are in the lockup; but Tom Sawder could not be found," said Mr. Singerlay. "You will be wanted as a witness tomorrow, Andy."

"We left them all clinging to the wreck of their boat, and I wonder how they got ashore," added Andy, who had heard nothing from the hoodlums since his return.

"I sent two officers down in the Dragon, and they found all the rascals except Tom," Mr. Singerlay explained. "They said a man had come after them in a boat, and had landed them on the west side of the island."

"Who was this man?" asked Andy.

"The boys did not know him, or pretended they did not. As soon as he had put them ashore, he pulled away with Tom, and that was the last they saw of either of them. They say that they heard high words between Tom and the man when the boat had passed around a point."

"But where did the boat go?" inquired Andy.

"The boys could not tell. They walked across the island to what they call the landing rock, but the boat was not there, and both the man and Tom had disappeared. Then the officers took the boys and sailed around the island and walked all over it in search of the missing vagabond; but they could not find him, the man, or the boat."

"That is very strange," said Mr. Lamb.

"Very singular indeed. I questioned the boys myself, and I am inclined to believe that they told the truth, for they were very badly scared," added the magnate.

Then Andy told what he knew about the stranger on Bunkel Island; but the party did not make any progress in solving the mystery which had bothered the inquirer at the time he was in the Diana.

"There is one thing about this affair which impresses me more than anything else," said Mr. Singerlay, after they had exhausted the discussion of the mystery. "Andy does not belong on my side of the controversy which has been kept alive between Barkpool and myself for over two years. Though he belongs to the Onongo faction, he went to the assistance of my daughter when she needed help; and if Barkpool himself would do such a deed, peace would be made at once."

"I am afraid he will never do such a thing," added Mr. Lamb, shaking his head.

"But I will, if I get the chance!" exclaimed Mr. Singerlay, springing out of his chair in the excitement of the moment. "With the example of Andy before me, I feel just as though I could do something noble and magnanimous even towards my great enemy."

Neither Andy nor his father deemed it prudent to say anything upon this remarkable proposition of the magnate. Mrs. Singerlay declared that she would be willing to live on two meals a day if the senseless quarrel could be brought to an end.

"Andy is hardly a member of either faction," suggested Mr. Lamb, who thought his son was getting rather more credit for magnanimity than he deserved.

"But Barkpool's son was in the boat with him, and ordered him not to meddle with the matter. The boy was just like his father, and would have let the rascal abuse my daughter to his heart's content," argued the magnate, very earnestly. "Andy had to stand up against Phin, and leave his boat in spite of him; and he did it. It was a noble action, and I appreciate it more than any other person can."

"Except me," added Di.

"Just as you like, Di. Now what can I do for this young man, to whom we owe so much?" continued Mr. Singerlay, looking at the machinist. "I am sure that Barkpool will punish him in some manner for what he has done; and he is malicious enough even to punish the father for the deed of the son."

"He has done so already, sir," replied Mr. Lamb.

"What! Has he discharged you?" demanded the magnate.

"He has; simply because I insisted that my son had done nothing more than his duty."

Mr. Lamb described the scene at the residence of Mr. Barkpool.

"When was this?" asked the magnate.

"Not five minutes before the explosion which carried away the upper dam," answered the engineer.

"Then five minutes later he would not have done it," added Mr. Singerlay, rubbing his hands. "Both dams are gone, and we must use steam. My machinist and engineer died last winter, and I have not yet found another. I was thinking what I should do when I came into the house from the river. I will give you a hundred dollars a month for a year, with a better house than you have now, rent free."

"I am out of a job, and of course I accept," said Mr. Lamb, laughing.

"You will have to go to work tonight, for Barkpool must see our mill in operation as usual tomorrow morning," added the magnate.

The engineer assented, and went to the engine room.

CHAPTER XIII.—THE VAULT OF THE MONTBAN BANK.

WHILE Mr. Singerlay went to the mill with the engineer, Andy remained with Di and her mother. He had hardly left the house before Dolph came

down stairs. He had changed his clothes, and looked like himself again, for he might easily have been mistaken for a common laborer when he came into the house.

Dolph had heard nothing about the affair on the lake, for he had gone away as soon as his father had refused to comply with his request to supply the money for the purchase of a steamer. He was a good deal surprised to see his sister on such good terms with Andy, but he did not ask any questions.

The magnate returned as soon as he had shown the new engineer the engine room, and Mr. Lamb came with him, for he found everything in order there, and it was not necessary to start the fires till after midnight.

While Mr. Singerlay and the engineer were talking about the running of the mill the next day, Mr. Roblock, the cashier of the Montoban Bank, came in to bring the keys. The magnate was the president of the institution, and he had a theory of his own in regard to the security of banks. He did not believe in trusting any one, and the cashier was hardly more than a clerk.

He was required to carry the keys to the house of the president when he closed the bank, and to come for them in the morning. The official did not object to this method, though it was rather humiliating, for if any one was taken from his bed in the night at the muzzle of a revolver, it would be the president, and not himself.

"You are rather late, Mr. Roblock," said the magnate, with a frown on his brow, as he consulted his watch. "Have you been out to see the river with the keys in your pocket?"

"No, sir; I have not been out of the bank since I closed at five o'clock," replied the cashier, annoyed at this implied suspicion. "I have not been to supper yet, for I have only just finished my work."

"I hope you do your work as far as possible in the day time," added the president, as he took the keys.

"I do, sir; and this is the first time for a year that I have kept the keys till after dark," answered the cashier, with his lips compressed.

"The Pontport Bank was robbed last week, and I think you have more cash on hand than usual at the present time," continued the magnate.

"I have nearly a hundred thousand dollars in the vault."

"You will not have so large a sum for a long time," said Mr. Singerlay, with a smile. "I was thinking of building a better dam as soon as the dry time came, for the old one was getting very weak, as has been fully proved tonight."

"I heard that the dam had been carried away as I came along the street," added the cashier, who seemed to be the only man in town who had not been out to see the scene of the wreck. "I hardly believed it, though I heard a strange roaring sound for some time."

"The upper dam was blown up, and the rush of water carried the lower one away."

The cashier asked a few questions, but he did not seem to be much interested; and it was evident that he would resign his office as soon as he could find another where his self respect would not be a constant burden to him.

"Take these keys up to my room, Dolph," said the magnate as soon as the

cashier had gone. "Where have you been all the evening? You did not come in to supper."

"I was on board of the Dragon when the dam broke away, and I ate my supper in the standing room, on what was left of my last lunch," replied the young gentleman, with a forced smile, as the engineer thought.

"Were you in the boat when the dam gave way?" asked his father.

"I was; and the rush of the water carried the Dragon on shore," answered Dolph, putting a good deal of excitement, real or assumed, into his manner. "I was thrown down and nearly washed away, but I saved myself by the skin of my teeth."

"Were either of the sail boats damaged?"

"Not a particle. I left them all right at their moorings."

"You left them all right?" demanded Mr. Singerlay.

"I did; they both held fast."

"What do you mean, Dolph? Both of them broke from their moorings, and I sent a man to pick them up before I came into the house."

"They were all right when I left them," persisted the hopeful son, though it was evident that he had put his foot in it. "I left them all right, and went on the bridge to see the water running through the break."

"When did you leave the boats?" asked Mr. Singerlay, with a heavy frown on his brow, for it looked as though there was something wrong in the son's statement.

"I left after the first rush of water was over."

"And the boats were at their moorings then?"

"Yes, sir."

"But I saw them a long way from the bridge myself when I went out. Of course they broke loose at the first rush of water, in less than two minutes after the dam gave way."

"If they broke away at all, it was some time after the first rush," said Dolph doggedly.

"No matter now; we will talk about it another time," added Mr. Singerlay. "Put the keys in my room."

"I am going to bed now, for I am tired out," added Dolph, as left the room.

There was something strange about Dolph's conduct, and as it looked as though there might be a case of domestic discipline, Mr. Lamb had risen from his chair and gone to the door, followed by Andy. Di and her mother had gone with them so far to bid them good night. As soon as the son was out of the room, they took their leave. Mr. Singerlay's brow was badly wrinkled, and as soon as Di was gone he told his wife that something must be done with their son.

The magnate saw that Dolph had been lying to him, but he was unable to penetrate his object in doing so. He talked of sending the young man to a military school in the State, where he would be subjected to strict discipline. The mother objected, and they went to their room still discussing the question. He was so interested in the subject that he did not observe that the bank keys were not on the table at the head of his bed.

Dolph went to bed as he said he should, but he did not get to sleep. In fact, he was not at all inclined to sleep. When the clock struck twelve on the church near the mansion, he got out of bed and dressed himself, taking the utmost care not to make any noise. Midnight was a late hour in Montoban, and all honest people were fast asleep.

When he had completed his toilet, he took the bunch of bank keys from between the mattresses on his bed, and put them in a side pocket of his coat. Then he opened the door with the same care he had used in dressing himself. To avoid making any noise, he carried his shoes in his hand, and when he reached the hall, he could hear his father snore, for the magnate had this unfortunate habit fully developed.

Without hindrance of any kind he reached the street and then the Montoban Bank. He was entirely familiar with the building, and the cashier had gratified his curiosity by showing him how the vault was opened, and where he kept the money. Dolph was a privileged person and it was not prudent to refuse to answer his questions, or even to prevent him from entering the vault.

Dolph went behind the counter and lighted a small lantern, which he had taken from the hall of the house; but he put his handkerchief over it so that the light should not be seen by any person in the street, if any one should chance to be out at this unseemly hour. Thus prepared he went to the vault, and had inserted one of the keys, when he heard a noise at one of the windows of the back room, which was used by the directors.

He listened, and heard a boring and grinding sound. It occurred to him that some one intended to rob the bank. But he had come for a purpose, and he determined to carry it out; then he would give the alarm and drive away the robbers.

He opened the vault after some time, for it was not an easy thing for one who had had so little experience with the locks. He intended to take the sum he wanted, put it in his pocket, and then return the keys to his father's chamber, so that he could find them on the little table at the head of his bed when he woke in the morning.

Dolph did not think the job would take more than two minutes of his time. He was aware that the cashier would have to explain how his cash happened to be short the next day. It looked like a very simple operation to the young man; and he was not in the habit of vexing himself over moral questions.

He was excited, for he was not used to this kind of business, and it took him longer than he expected to get into the vault, though he got there at last. As soon as he was inside of the strong box, he removed the covering from the lantern. As he did so a strong pair of hands was placed at his throat and he was dragged from the safe.

When he tried to shout, his captor choked him. He was thrown on the floor, and two persons stood over him, one of them pointing a revolver at his head.

(To be continued.)

Oliver Optic.

THE SINGING TEACHER.

An unlooked for episode in a Sinking Mountain courtship—The dogged purpose of Jim Turpin after he discovers the disloyalty of his betrothed, and the sequel to the outcome.

SEATED upon a high point of rock on the north side of Sinking Mountain, were two men, silently gazing out over the lower hills and valleys. The two men wore heavy boots, dark shirts and broad brimmed hats, with the brims turned up and pinned to the crowns in front with hawthorns. One of the men held a long rifle across his lap, and the other wore a belt in which were a rough hunting knife and a pistol.

"'Pears like the revenuers air keepin' kinder quiet of late," remarked the smaller of the two men.

"Yes," assented the other.

"Mebbe the money's gin out, though I guess thet ain't hit, neither, 'case they must have a lot of it."

The larger man did not reply, and for several minutes the silence was unbroken except by the sounds of a chopping axe, which was being vigorously handled by some one on the opposite hillside.

At length the smaller man again spoke, this time turning half around in order to face the big man, while a mischievous light shone from his eyes.

"Thinking about Jo and the singin' teacher, I reckon?"

There was no reply, and in a few moments the man continued, "Thet feller's got a purty good class down at the Fork school house. He's an uncommon good lookin' chap; an' Jo Randall's a gal 'at likes good looks, or I guess some o' the rest on us'd stand a better chance alongside o' you, not sayin' nothin' no ways flatterin', Jim."

"Have you seed 'im, Ike?" Jim wanted to know.

"Oh, yes. I've been down thar to singin' once or twice. He's eddicated, an' wears purty good clothes; an' some on 'em 'lowed he come from Atlanta."

Jim frowned, but did not say anything, and the other went on. "He's a boardin' at old Burt Randall's, an' fust off, Jim, he'll have Jo's heart clean away from you. -I tell you, you better sorter go down an' see about it. Thar's no tellin' about these 'ere fellows that come from town."

Jim rose, his towering figure throwing a huge shadow behind him as he swung the long old rifle over his shoulder.

"I guess I'll go to that 'ar singin' school tonight," he said as he turned and strode away along the narrow path, closely followed by his companion.

The Fork school house was situated on the south side of the mountain near where the small stream emptied into the Chatooga River; and here Lester Wilkes was teaching a singing school at night. Wilkes had come up into the mountains to rusticate. He was a good singer, and had announced

that he would teach a singing school while he was there, if one of the Randall boys would get up a class of a dozen or more who would be willing to pay a small tuition fee. Alf Randall had found no difficulty in organizing a class, and now the school was in a flourishing condition. Every other night Wilkes and the Randalls would wend their way down the river to the school house; and it was soon noticed that the teacher was particularly attentive to Josephine Randall, whose pink cheeks and bright eyes were attractive to more than one young mountaineer. It was at about this stage of the progress of the singing school that Jim Turpin decided to pay it a visit, although he seldom ventured far from the green forests and the shelving rocks of the mountain, on account of the vigilance of the raiders who were scouting around here and there at almost all times, endeavoring to capture the king of the blockaders.

Jim strode into the school house, his big form almost blocking up the doorway as he passed through it, and took a seat far back, where he remained a silent spectator and listener until the lesson was closed. He watched the smiles and pretty glances which the teacher bestowed upon Jo, and a great hard lump began to form in Jim's throat.

When the class was at last dismissed, Turpin waited just outside the door until Jo came out, when he caught her by the sleeve and gently drew her aside, while he bent down and rapidly whispered in her ear:

"Jo, I can't git to see you often, but as there's a heaven above us don't forget 'at I love you."

"No, no; I won't, Jim," she said as her hand slipped through his, which pressed it gently though firmly. Then she hurried away to join the others before she was missed.

Jim turned and strode off through the darkness, and was soon making his way up over the mountain trail.

* * * * *

On top of a granite cliff stood the figure of a man in the darkness. The stars were shining overhead, but there was no moon; and the deepest darkness reigned throughout the dense forest back of the cliff. The figure was intently watching the movements of a faint light which was moving mysteriously through the woods on the opposite ridge. Jim Turpin watched it closely as it rounded the head of the ravine and came on towards him down the cliff ridge. Evidently it was some one carrying a torch, but who could it be? Now the light was hidden a few moments, then it came up again, bobbing up and down as the bearer came on over the uneven surface of the trail, which turned at a point on the cliff not far from where Jim stood, and thence zigzagged tortuously down its rugged face. The watcher did not move, only turning his head slowly to follow with his eyes the course of the torch bearer.

At length the latter came to the point where the trail turned on the cliff, and Jim started from his rigid posture as he recognized Jo Randall and the singing teacher. Jo carried a small torch and was leading the way. Jim's hand, which held the long rifle, trembled, and he clutched the gun with such a grip that the nails of his fingers almost pierced the palm of his hand.

Jo and Wilkes came to a halt, and Jo, having placed the torch in a niche of the rock at her side, turned to the singing teacher with a white face.

"We can't go no further with a light," she said; "we'll have to leave hit here till we come back. They'd see us arter we git down this 'ere cliff."

"All right, my dear," said Wilkes, as he drew near to her. Back in the darkness stood Jim, almost choked with the emotions that raged within him.

"Perhaps we'd better hurry on," continued Wilkes, taking Jo caressingly by the arm. "It is getting late, and I only want to find out where it is tonight."

But Jo stood still; and from his cover of darkness Jim could see tears in her eyes as she spoke.

"Somehow, I don't feel like I'm a doin' jest ezactly right, a showin' you the way to Jim's still house, even ef—ef we air a gwine to be married."

"Oh, come now, Jo," said Wilkes, placing his arm around her waist and drawing her closely to him, "my little Jo, my sweetheart, we don't want to punish Jim. We only want to get him down to Atlanta and show him what a great wrong it is to defraud the government, then he will come back home a better man; and you, my darling, will go with me to Atlanta, where we will be married; and some day we can have Jim to visit us, and he will be glad that you have found a home where you need want for nothing. I know Jim is a good fellow, but you deserve more than he will ever be able to give you, for he will always be dodging the law. Now don't you love me better than you do Jim?"

"Yes, yes, I believe I do; you are so different from Jim. But he is so good, Jim is; an' you'll promise me they shan't harm him, not airy hair of his head?"

"Why, yes; haven't I promised it a thousand times already?"

"Yes, but I wanted you to promise it again right here afore we go any fuder."

Out in the darkness Jim was still listening, but now there were tears in his eyes.

"An' you won't go to the still house tonight arter you've seed it?"

"No, no; we will go back home then; and I will come tomorrow night and bring some men from Tallulah."

"Oh, I'm afeared they will kill Jim."

"Oh, no; the men will only come to carry away the still. I know Jim will go along with us peaceably."

Wilkes kissed her two or three times, then released her, and the two began to make their way down over the rough pass through the darkness.

For a moment Jim stood motionless, then walked to the edge of the cliff, and, lowering himself over its side, hung for a moment by his hands to the jutting rock before dropping into space. It was twelve or fifteen feet to the ledge below, and another ten feet to the base of the cliff, where Jim landed in a few seconds, and strode swiftly away down the ravine. Five minutes later he stood in the doorway of a low, rough cabin, near the center of which stood a rock furnace with a glowing fire under the copper kettle

which rested upon it. Two or three men were seated about the place, but as Jim entered they rose.

"What's the matter, Jim?" asked one of them.

"Singin' teacher's a detective."

Involuntarily the hands of the moonshiners went to their pistol belts.

"Boys," continued Jim after a brief pause. "I want you to git, 'case the detective's purty close here, an' he's got a guide what knows the trail."

"Narry a git," said one. "Who's the guide?"

"That's one thing I ain't a tellin'," said Jim, "but I said git, an' git ye shall. Go by the Fork trail so's you won't meet him, d'ye understand?"

Jim Turpin was usually understood when he spoke.

"Pinter," he continued, turning to one of the men, "I'm gwine to leave everything to you, 'case I know you'll treat me fair and squar, not sayin' anythin' agin the rest of ye. Git everythin' out'n here afore tomorrow night. I'm a gwine back here to meet the detective, an' gin up."

"What!" exclaimed Pinter. "What in the world are you a gwine to do thet for?"

"For reasons I ain't a tellin'," replied Jim, as he turned and walked away through the darkness again.

Hurrying off by the route over which he came, Jim reached the cliff where the torch was still burning, and waited for the return of Jo and Wilkes. When they reached the top of the rocks, Jim stepped out from the darkness and confronted them. Quick as a flash Wilkes covered him with a revolver.

"I gin up," said Jim, "an' I want you to take me right along tonight. Put up your gun; when I gin up, I gin up. An', Jo," he continued, turning to the girl, "don't you cry; I hear'n it all, an' I know it ain't no fault o' your'n. Hit mout ha' been a wrong way to make it, Jo, but I been a stillin' a long time, an' a puttin' by, an' a puttin' by, till I got a right smart chance o' gold laid away, a hopin'—a hopin' that some day—"

"I'm ready, mister," he broke off, suddenly turning toward Wilkes. Then abruptly snatching the torch from its crevice, he strode up the ridge, followed by Jo and the singing teacher.

The train which bore Jim Turpin a prisoner to Atlanta, bore Jo Randall to the same place to become the wife of his rival and captor, Lester Wilkes.

* * * * *

Jim Turpin had completed his twelve months term in Fulton County jail. He had been released on Saturday, and had been spending Sunday in seeing the city before his departure for the hills again. Jim had never seen or heard of Jo since they had parted on arriving in the city more than a year before. But now as he wandered through the many streets of the Gate City, he was watching every door and every window on either side of the street in a vague sort of way, yet he was not quite sure that he wanted to see Jo. It was growing late in the afternoon; already the high electric lights were aglow, and Jim began to think of returning from his walk. He had turned about, and was walking along a narrow street which was lined by two rows of dingy looking houses. His chin lay against his breast, and he had dropped into a not altogether pleasant reverie.

But he was suddenly aroused from this mood by the rustling of skirts as a woman swept past him. Jim raised his head, looked for a moment after the retreating figure, then started in rapid pursuit. Despite the dull twilight which had settled down, he had recognized the form; and, when he had approached within a few feet of her, he called her name, "Jo!" There was no answer, and the woman increased her speed. But Jim's long strides soon brought him up with her, and he was walking by her side.

"Jo," said Jim, "ain't you a gwine to speak to me?"

"Oh, Jim!" exclaimed the voice which he had once known so well, as the woman buried her face in her hands, "please go on an' leave me."

"Leave you? What for, I wonder? I reckon I've got a right to speak to you in passin'; ain't I, Jo?"

"But you don't know all," sobbed the woman. "Oh, Jim, I ain't what I used to be when you loved me."

"What's the matter? Whar's the singin' teacher?"

"I hain't seed him in a long time. Oh, oh, Jim; don't ever tell 'em at home any better'n 'at I'm married to the singin' teacher."

Jim's brow contracted in a deep frown as all became clear to his understanding; and they walked along for more than a block in silence. At length Jim spoke.

"Jo, they're a needin' of you at home. Your mother's a gittin' old, you know, an' can't do all the cookin' an' spinnin. I'm a gwine home, an' if you'll meet me at the car shed in the mornin', we'll go 'long home together. I've got money enough for two tickets. Will you come, Jo?"

"Yes, Jim, I'll come. Oh, Jim, we've served twelve months apiece, but my punishment's been a hundred times worse than your'n."

They parted soon afterwards; and Jim returned to the business part of the city, with a dark cloud overshadowing his brow, but with the light of a determined purpose gleaming from his eyes.

When he came to the car shed the following morning he found Jo waiting for him, and a few moments later they were seated in an east bound train.

"Jo," said Jim, as they rolled out of the station, "singin' teacher's dead."

Charles Sloan Reid.

THE PLUNGE.

THERE is a rapture in the headlong leap,
The wedgelike cleaving of the closing deep;
A feeling full of hardihood and power,
With which we court the waters that devour.
Oh! 'tis a feeling great, sublime, supreme,
Like the ecstatic influence of a dream,
To speed one's way thus o'er the sliding plain,
And make a kindred being with the main.

—Bailey.

A MONTH IN THE MOON.*

The marvelous experiences that grew out of the Lunar Company, Limited—How the catch-penny scheme of three adventurers was transformed into an extraordinary contribution to the world of science—Scenes and incidents of a sojourn on the earth's satellite.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

MESSRS. GRYPHINS, VOGEL, AND WAGNER, three adventurers in Melbourne, Australia, start The Lunar Company, for the Conquest and Exploration of the Mineral Riches of the Moon. "But how are we to get to the moon?" is the question asked by large numbers of stockholders, and at a public meeting Wagner talks learnedly of a tubular tunnel, but has his theory utterly demolished by Norbert Mauny, a young Frenchman, who declares that in order to complete such a piece of work within the stipulated time of five years, it must rise at the rate of 50,000 miles a year!

The assemblage is panic stricken and the stockholders demand their money back, when Mauny calls for order and announces that he has a plan to propose—that of attracting the moon to the earth by erecting a series of powerful magnets. The idea is received with enthusiasm, and Mauny is voted manager of the company. The Bayouda Desert in the Soudan is selected as the site for the erection of the magnets. The expedition sets out at Suakim. Mauny meets the French consul, M. Kersain, and his daughter Gertrude, who decide to accompany him on a visit to the Mogaddem of Rhadameh, a local ruler whose favor must be obtained before the transportation of the material across the desert can be made.

This Mogaddem is a weird sort of personage, and possesses a hideously ugly dwarf. After promising to pay certain large sums as tribute, Norbert secures the coöperation he desires and soon after the return to the seaport, the expedition sets out for the Bayouda Desert. Here the observatories, reflectors, etc., are erected on the Peak of Tehhali, and work proceeds with gratifying success till Messrs. Gryphins, Vogel, and Wagner are detected in a conspiracy to turn the workmen against Norbert. They are imprisoned and a guard placed over them, and then Norbert, hearing that trouble threatens Khartoum, where M. Kersain has been transferred, determines to go thither and see if he cannot induce him and his daughter to take refuge at the Peak.

The consul refuses to leave his post, but it is finally arranged that Gertrude, accompanied by Dr. Briet, her uncle, and Fatima, her maid, set out with Norbert for Tehhali. On the road they meet a woman fig seller, and shortly after eating some of her fruit a deep sleep falls on all members of the party. On awaking Gertrude discovers that she is in a strange, but beautiful apartment, with only Fatima, who sleeps near her. But presently the hideous dwarf of the Mogaddem of Rhadameh presents himself and offers his hand in marriage. Failing in this he resolves to march with the forces he possesses on the Peak, taking the prisoners with him, and there destroy before their very eyes the work on which Mauny has built such high hopes. But it turns out that the men employed by the young astronomer and those in the service of the dwarf come from the same country, and they refuse to fight against one another. Kaddour is taken captive and placed in charge of Virgil, Mauny's right hand man. Discovered in an attempt to win away the allegiance of the Negro Guard, he is condemned to be shot, but swallows poison just before the execution is to take place. Soon afterward the Mahdi's forces surround the Peak and call upon Mauny to surrender, which he stoutly refuses to do.

Meantime the magnets are working splendidly, and at length Norbert sets in operation the forces that, in six days, are to bring the moon down to the earth. The satellite responds readily, and by the sixth day is so close and appears so immense that not only are the Mahdi's forces utterly panic stricken, but Norbert's party themselves are terrified.

Sir Bucephalus Coghill, one of the chief members of the company, ventures to hint to the

*This story began in the February issue of THE ARGOSY. The three back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 30 cents.

young astronomer that he thinks it would be safer for all hands if the experiment be stopped—which Mauny says can be done by simply touching two knobs—when the baronet's valet, Tyrrel Smith, in an agony of apprehension, rushes to the tablet where the knobs controlling all the motors are situated, raises one and lowers another. A fearful crash ensues and all are thrown into insensibility.

CHAPTER XXVI.—AFTER THE CATASTROPHE.

IT was broad daylight. A deep silence reigned in the Tehbali observatory, when Norbert opened his eyes. The intensity of the silence was remarkable. It was, in the strictest sense, a deathlike silence.

The day was a brilliant one and the heat quite overpowering.

At first Norbert had some difficulty in recollecting what had happened.

He found himself on his back, thrown down doubtless by the first shock of the cataclysm, on an Arab divan underneath the ebony shelf in the Hall of Motors. Everything around was in disorder; the furniture scattered about, and the electric apparatus twisted, while the magnetometer lay on the ground broken, as also were all the objects made of porcelain.

Gertrude, Fatima, the doctor, the baronet, and the valet lay round about, some on the sofa, where the earthquake had found them, the others on the matting that covered the floor.

Norbert's first care was to run to the assistance of Mlle. Kersain, whose name, as we know, had been the last on his lips. She was in a deep swoon, but otherwise apparently unharmed. Her pulse beat feebly, and a faint sigh came through her half closed lips.

From her Norbert instinctively turned to the doctor. He was crouched under the arm chair, where, when the shock came, he had been quietly drinking his tea. Seemingly his alarm had passed off into sleep, for Norbert just touched him on the arm and he awoke, rubbing his eyes vigorously and looking about him in evident astonishment.

He jumped to his feet, but for a moment was silent as if stupefied. Then turning to Norbert, he said :

"What has happened to us?"

"I cannot say; but it is a blessing to see *you* up again. Come to your niece first. There she is, quite unconscious."

Letting himself be led to the sofa, the doctor took the girl's hand and felt her pulse, mechanically, as it were, standing there silent and motionless, as if he had no power to speak.

"Her pulse beats, at all events, does it not?" impatiently asked Norbert, who had seized her other hand. "What ought to be done?"

With, as it seemed, a tremendous effort of the will, the doctor muttered dreamily the words :

"Medicine chest!"

Norbert understood. He ran into the adjoining office to fetch the chest, stumbling on the way over Virgil, who lay insensible on the floor, and quickly hastened back.

"What medicine shall I give you?" he asked, as he pressed the spring lock.

"Sulphuric ether," answered the doctor, still dreamily.

Seeing that it was useless to ask for further instructions, Norbert took the little bottle so labeled out of its case, and held it under Gertrude's nostrils, moistening at the same time her temples and forehead.

The rapid evaporation of the fluid was instantly followed by a sensation of freshness, which soon revived the young girl. She opened her eyes, sat up on the couch, and looked about her with astonishment.

"Fatima!" she murmured faintly, on seeing her companion still insensible.

"She is unconscious, as we all were five minutes ago," said Norbert, as he went up to the little maid and administered ether to her also. "But she will soon revive. Look!"

"Fatima!" repeated Gertrude. "Poor little girl, you were dreadfully frightened, were you not?"

"Oh, yes, dreadfully frightened! But it is all over now. See, mistress, I can walk again."

She made two or three steps and flung herself into Gertrude's outstretched arms.

Norbert had gone off to attend to the baronet.

"He is only stunned, like the others, and *you* don't seem to be quite yourself, doctor, even now," continued Norbert; "a good dose of ether will not do you any harm."

So saying, he suited the action to the word, and brought the doctor round with his own remedy.

"It is true," said Briet, "I feel quite dazed still. Many thanks, dear Mauny, for your attention. Now we must see after Coghill. His pulse is marvelously weak, quite thread-like, in fact. However, let's hope he will be all right. Better rub his head with brandy, I think. I will do it if you will attend to the other one."

"To that individual there who was the cause of all this topsy turvy business? Do you think I am going to attend to that fellow? No. Virgil comes before Smith. I shall look after him first."

Hastening into an adjoining apartment Norbert raised that worthy servant from his hard couch on the floor, and rubbed and shook him till at last he showed signs of life.

"Halloa! It is daylight! And we are still alive!" cried Virgil, awakening to the consciousness of his surroundings. "I didn't expect to be here after that earthquake!"

Meanwhile, thanks to Briet, both Sir Bucephalus and his valet were once more astir. The latter's personal appearance was not improved by an enormous bump on the forehead. He sat up on the matting, and stared about him aimlessly, without apparently realizing that he had been the direct cause of the catastrophe.

"I really don't know why we should keep the windows closed," said Norbert. "The heat is suffocating!"

He opened one of the windows, but shut it again immediately, so violent a draft was caused. This was very odd, for the current of air came from

within, and every other opening was still closed. Norbert was looking round to find out the reason when Gertrude exclaimed from the other window :

"What a very strange view ! I never saw anything like it ! 'The earthquake must have turned everything upside down all round us.'"

Every one ran to see what was the matter.

The changes were indeed remarkable. In place of the yellow sandy plain that formerly stretched in uniform monotony almost to the very foot of Tehbali, broken only here and there by a few undulations, they now beheld an abyss whence rose up sharply defined serrated mountains.

It appeared as if the crust had given way under the influence of some mighty subterranean force that had torn up the surface and redistributed it in weird, fantastic forms.

Bright red, staring yellow, pale blue, and violet colored rocks stood out on every side in a medley of color that was far from pleasing to the eye. In the ravines flowed lava of every hue similar to that found on Vesuvius and Etna. It was, in fact, evident that they were real volcanic craters, now extinct and silent. There they were, side by side, of every imaginable height and size.

It was impossible to estimate the distance properly, for by a strange optical illusion the rocks that were furthest stood out as clearly as the near ones, down to the least little detail. Instead of diminishing gradually to the vanishing point, they were so boldly defined against the sky that it seemed almost as if it were possible to touch their bright colored edges.

Another remarkable circumstance was that the shadows were as clearly portrayed in the blinding light as were the rocks themselves. They were all as black as ink, without any graduation or shading off.

The aspect of the landscape was more terrifying and spectral than can be conceived. There was no trace of life anywhere. Neither bird, bush, nor blade of grass was to be seen ; nor was the silence broken by the sound of any trickling brook. The impression left upon the mind was that of utter solitude, desolation, and death.

Another strange phenomenon was to be noted. Although the sun shone in the full blaze of his meridian splendor on the bare and dreary waste, myriads of starry constellations were apparent in the deep gloom of the sky. The effect was startling. It was similar to that produced by lighted candles round a funeral bier in broad daylight.

As to the hostile Mahdist and Arab camps that had encircled the Peak of Tehbali, they were nowhere to be seen ! All trace of them had disappeared. The catastrophe had seemingly swallowed up tents, batteries, men, and beasts !

But the strangest fact was the great height from which they now looked down. It seemed as if, in the general upheaval, the earth at the foot of the mountain had shrunk at the same time. This was the general impression. Their eyes had been accustomed for a long while to the vertical distance of four or five thousand feet separating them from the plain ; but this was something quite different, for they looked down now from a height of at least fifteen or twenty thousand feet, perhaps even more.

Amazement kept them all silent. They were spellbound.

On a sudden, Norbert darted to the door and ran on to the esplanade, as if a new idea had struck him.

But he had taken only a few steps when he felt himself greatly oppressed. The blood mounted to his brain, he gasped for breath, staggered, and had but just time to get back to the observatory. He was on the point of suffocation.

As soon as he got indoors he felt relieved at once. His lungs resumed their function, and he breathed freely again.

To the general surprise, he rushed to the half open door, and slammed it violently; then, hurrying to the two windows, he carefully stopped up every crevice with all the bits of rag he could lay hands on.

"What are you doing?" asked the baronet. "Are you afraid of a draft?"

"I am hoarding up the little amount of air that we have," answered Norbert. "When we have used up what we have now, we shall have no more!"

They looked at one another with curiosity.

Had the catastrophe, perchance, turned even his well balanced brain? Was he under some temporary hallucination?

He read the thought in the doctor's eyes, and could not repress a smile.

"Oh, make yourselves easy," he said. "I am not mad. But I have something to tell you which is of much greater importance, and of which you are far from having the least suspicion! Mademoiselle," he continued, turning to Gertrude, "are you strong enough to bear a great surprise, and, I fear, a painful one?"

Gertrude grew pale; but she looked at the young astronomer bravely.

"Speak on," she replied, with her usual calm dignity. "I promise to be courageous, whatever it is. Anything is preferable to suspense."

"Listen, then. A while ago you were remarking upon the extraordinary changes in our surroundings; you attributed them, and doubtless you still attribute them, to the catastrophe that had nigh been the death of us all. Well, it is no such thing! Nothing has changed around us; of that I am certain. *It is we who have changed place.* We are no longer in a state of siege, we are castaways! We are no longer in the Soudan, we are no longer in Africa, nor even on the terrestrial globe! We have been transported—to the moon!"

"To the moon!" cried Sir Bucephalus. "Do you mean to say that the rocks and craters around us are part of the lunar landscape?"

"Precisely so," replied Norbert. "I have not yet studied the question sufficiently to be able to tell you how it has happened that the disaster has transported us and all our belongings from the plateau of Tehbali to a lunar plateau, but there can be no doubt that we were blown into the air, and then drawn up by the attraction of the moon."

"This is only an hypothesis of yours."

"But the fact remains that we are actually transplanted to a new world, separated from our own by an immense distance, and there is every proof that this new-world can be no other than the moon! You see for yourselves that everything now before your eyes is quite different from an earthly land-

escape? For my part, as I have just been out, I can affirm that the exterior atmosphere (if, indeed, it exists at all) is absolutely unbreathable."

"In one word," said Gertrude gently, "you have come to the conclusion that we are on the moon."

"I have so little doubt of it," replied Norbert, "that I have already taken the most pressing measure for our safety by closing our doors and windows."

"Well, well; there is nothing so dreadful about it, after all," said Gertrude cheerfully, to reassure the terrified Fatima. "It was always your intention to get on the moon if you could."

"The prospect, anyhow, is far from cheerful," said the baronet, "if it is true, which I am not at all sure about yet. One wouldn't mind the fact of being on the moon; but it is quite another thing to be without air! And when we think that we owe it all to that imbecile!" he added, with a furious look at Smith.

The unhappy valet was already sufficiently terror stricken at finding himself on the moon, and now to be blamed for it, in the righteous indignation of his master, was quite too much! His knees gave way under him, and he sank in a heap on the ground, muttering between his teeth,

"Smith, you're an idiot!"

CHAPTER XXVII.—A STRANGE COUNTRY.

WHEN they had somewhat recovered from their first surprise, Norbert was assailed with questions.

"If I have understood rightly," said the doctor, "you maintain that we are now breathing the air we brought with us in the observatory?"

"Just so."

"And that once this is consumed we shall have none left?"

"Doubtless."

"But how, in that case, are we going to breathe?"

"How?" repeated Norbert, laughing. "Why, we must make our own air! Have we not a supply of chemical products on purpose? By the bye, I must go and overhaul them. I am rather anxious to see how we stand as regards stores."

Followed by the doctor and Gertrude, the astronomer proceeded through the Hall of Telescopes (which evidently had not suffered much from its displacement) to the store rooms, where he found everything in much better order than he had expected.

There were a few breakages, but nothing of importance. They had done hardly any damage. The instruments were intact; most of them were fixed in the ground, and the cases of special apparatus were as perfect as the day they left the workshop.

There were two or three cases of "oxygen respirators." Calling Virgil to assist, Norbert opened several of the cases, and took them to the laboratory to put them in working order.

When the reservoirs were filled with gas, Norbert fastened one on his back by the leather straps attached to it for the purpose, which made the

thing look like a tin pannier surmounted by a large leather bag. This bag was fastened under the left arm by an appendage which, when squeezed by the elbow, expelled a certain quantity of oxygen into a rubber tube. The tube was connected with the nose and mouth of the wearer of the apparatus, and fitted tightly on his face by means of a copper mask furnished with pads of chamois leather.

Thus equipped, Norbert provided himself with a mariner's compass, a spy glass, and a rifle, and returned to the drawing room.

"May I ask you whom you are going to war with?" asked the baronet, feeling the need of a little diversion from his melancholy mood.

"I am only going to explore the surroundings," answered Norbert. "Something is puzzling me, and I must find it out. I can't see how we can be on the moon and in our own observatory at one and the same time. The whole summit of Tehbali must have been carried off bodily. I'll make it clear, however, within the next quarter of an hour."

"Is there any reason why I should not join you in the voyage of discovery?" asked Sir Bucephalus.

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure. Only you must be equipped like me—that is to say, with a respirator. I have just filled five or six. Virgil will fetch one of them."

"May we not come, too?" cried Gertrude and her uncle, almost simultaneously.

"I don't think it would be wise," answered Norbert. "You shall go afterwards, if we find it quite safe and prudent."

This was agreed to, and the baronet hastened to equip himself for the expedition.

"I am fully as curious as you," he said to Norbert, "to ascertain how it comes about that our observatory is now in the moon; that is," he added quickly, "if we are really in the moon."

"What!" cried Norbert. "You don't mean to say you are still in doubt about it? Your doubts will soon be laid to rest now."

So saying, the two young men glided through the half opened door, and were gone.

There was not much change apparently in the esplanade. They went along it quickly till they reached the zigzag path down the mountain.

Contrary to Norbert's expectation, there was nothing fresh to be seen here. The path wound as formerly, down the flank of the Peak, till it reached the bed of vitrified glass under the mountain. But instead of a plain stretching beyond, there was now a considerable space between the end of the path and the lower plain.

And another strange thing! Instead of facing east, as formerly, the path lay now towards the north, as shown both by the position of the sun and by the little pocket compass Norbert had with him. In fact, it was clear that not only the summit of Tehbali, but the entire mountain, had been forcibly transported by some irresistible power from one globe to the other.

The heat was intense, owing to the almost verticle rays of the sun, which looked much as it did when viewed from the earth, with the exception that

the protuberances on the surface were now more clearly visible to the naked eye than they were even through the telescope in the observatories of the earth.

This was a joyful discovery to Norbert, who was an ardent astronomical student. It was to be explained by the extreme tenuity of the atmosphere, which accounted also for the appearance at midday of countless starry constellations. The earthly atmosphere is like a veil between our glasses and the stars; but the lunar atmosphere leaves free passage to the rays of light or of heat, and unlike that of the earth it lends no azure hue to the sky, which, viewed from the moon, is black as ink.

Not only did our two explorers find themselves in a furnace-like heat, but they also discovered that they were now of an extraordinary lightness. They scarcely felt their feet as they tripped along rather than walked. Every moment they were making extraordinary bounds, sometimes of four or five yards, while meaning to step aside from some little obstacle, such as a stone or piece of rock.

These gymnastics were so involuntary that each looked at his companion in astonishment. Norbert stared at seeing the baronet gamboling along in this way, leaping lightly like a hare, and bounding aloft every now and then as if he were a rubber ball.

"There is something marvelous about this," he thought. "He will break his neck if he goes on in that extravagant fashion!"

At this moment he himself made a slight backward movement to avoid a precipice, and was to his surprise taken six or seven yards up in the air, falling gently down again on the ground.

The baronet, his own gymnastic exercise scarcely over, looked at Norbert with displeased surprise at such undignified pranks.

"I have it!" suddenly thought Norbert. "Gravity is playing us these tricks. It is six times less on the moon than on the earth. It follows that our muscular power is sixfold greater, and hence we have become regular acrobats."

He could not resist the pleasure of communicating the interesting fact to the baronet, and untied his mask for that purpose.

"Well, my dear fellow," said he, "do you at last believe you are in the moon?"

To his great surprise, there was no reply. The baronet did not pay the least attention to him, but gave a tremendous leap over a little rivulet that the rains had left in the road.

Norbert thought at first from his silence and the expression of indifference on his countenance that Sir Bucephalus was in the sulks. But what had he done to offend him? He could not conceive what his offense had been.

"What an odd idea!" thought Norbert. "Such a strange time, too, to choose for the sulks. What can he be savage with me about? Perhaps he is mad because I laughed at his gambols. No matter, I shan't trouble my head about it!"

But in the midst of these reflections he suddenly went off into a fit of laughter—a fit of *silent* laughter, though. He had just discovered that he

had only articulated his words without pronouncing them. The voice was not audible; or, to speak more accurately, there was no voice or sound of any kind on the moon, because the tenuity of the atmosphere precluded all vibration.

"Poor old Bucephalus! And I suspected him of childish sulking," thought Norbert. "He has taken his mask off twice or thrice. Perhaps he has asked *me* several questions without getting any reply; and maybe he is now wondering what is amiss on *my* side. How on earth, or rather on the moon, am I to explain matters? There is nothing for it but to wait till we get back."

CHAPTER XXVIII.—MOON STRUCK.

THERE was nothing to be done under such circumstances but to continue their silent observations of the strange geological conditions around them.

They had now reached a depth of five thousand feet beneath the observatory, and yet this was not half the distance separating them from the plain. The zigzag road ended in a gentle slope which continued to the plain, and did not look difficult of descent, although there was no beaten track.

Nothing could be more striking than the contrast between the rock of Tehbali and the said slope. The soil of Tehbali was of a dull red hue, covered with yellow grass and various kinds of shrubs; that of the slope was bright green, interspersed with glistening mauve and gray streaks of color, without the least trace of vegetation.

There were thus two perfectly distinct zones: the upper one, belonging to Tehbali; the other, that of the lunar mountain. Beneath, again, in a yet lower region, was a series of small craters, forming, as it were, a kind of rugged plateau.

Instead of descending the slope, Norbert chose to skirt it horizontally for two or three miles round the base of the peak. He made a discovery thereby.

"No doubt about it," he thought. "It is clear now that the *whole mountain* of Tehbali was taken up and thrown on its base. This seems rather odd at first sight. But, given an explosion of subterranean force, caused by the sudden backward recoil of the moon, it appears only natural that the Peak should have been uprooted, torn, like a tooth from its socket, out of the sandy soil that had been its bed. Once launched into space, the solid nature of the rock would keep it together, and by the force of the shock it was brought near enough to the moon to be attracted by her (which is intelligible since our satellite almost touched the earth). The conical shape of the mountain made it inevitable that it should fall on its own base.

"It, was, indeed, *obliged* to fall on its base. There is no exception to the laws of gravity. The rule is invariably the same, whether it concerns a magnetic mountain weighing millions of tons, or only clogged dice. Tehbali resembles the latter, inasmuch as, once launched into space, it was bound to fall on the heaviest side, that is, on its base.

"Now what was it that softened the shock of the fall to a certain extent?

Two causes are evident. One was the slight influence of gravity on the moon; hence our rock alighted as gently as a bird, just as I leap now with such perfect ease. The other softening element was this very mountain that caught us on our way."

Thus did Norbert reason to himself. There was one point still to clear up. Was the mountain a peak or a crater?

Every probability pointed to its being a crater. First of all, there were only craters to be seen as far as the eye could reach. Then it was easy to see that a crater could hold the magnetic rock of Tehbali; but there would have been a difficulty in the rock settling down atop of another peak.

Still skirting the base of Tehbali, the explorers arrived at length on a kind of terrace, whence they had a much more extended view than from the other side of the mountain.

They perceived that the lesser craters of the plain gradually diminished towards the west and south, till they reached a sandy hollow region, whilst from the north to the east, on the contrary, they rose in tiers till they reached an elevated chain of mountains running in the same direction. This circumstance, together with the characteristic aspect of the chain, was like a ray of light to the young astronomer.

He turned round mechanically to communicate the result of his observations to Sir Bucephalus, but suddenly remembering it was impossible to make himself heard, took out his memorandum book, and rapidly sketching the country, handed it to the baronet with this explanatory note:

"I think we have alighted on the crater of Rheticus, and that this chain of mountains is that of the Lunar Apennines. These sandy plains must be the Sea of Vapors, the Sea of Tranquillity, and the Sea of Serenity."

Having read this note, Sir Bucephalus returned the memorandum to Norbert, making vain efforts to speak. The young astronomer saw these attempts, and wrote again:

"I am obliged to use a pencil, for there is no sound on the moon."

"Is that so?" wrote the baronet in his turn. "I have spoken to you several times without a single word in reply."

"The effect of the moon," replied Norbert. "Another strange thing. You see that block of stone near your right leg? It measures at least two cubic yards. Try to lift it, and you will see."

Sir Bucephalus looked incredulously at the enormous block, which two horses could scarcely have moved on earth. He stooped down, however, to please his companion. To his inexpressible surprise, the rock moved easily under the slight pressure of his hand.

At the same instant Norbert took his flight, and passed over the baronet's head at a height of eight or ten yards, coming down again as gracefully as a bird.

"Effect of the moon!" he smiled.

But although the baronet heard nothing, he was not going to be outdone. He took *his* flight, and rose so high that Norbert was piqued into a repetition of his own exploits, and so they went on for several minutes, each trying to emulate the other in a series of acrobatic achievements.

At last the two young men sat down side by side and looked at each other with a perplexed expression, mingled on Norbert's side with one of amusement.

"I will explain these phenomena to you," began the astronomer, again forgetting that he could not make the least sound.

Sir Bucephalus, seeing his lips move, turned the most attentive ear in hopes of hearing, but all in vain.

"I give it up!" gesticulated Norbert, shrugging his shoulders. "It would take too long to write it."

He tried to explain the situation to his friend by a succession of gestures. The baronet looked on in amazement while his companion leaped over enormous obstacles, lifted weights that looked colossal, and then, coming up to Sir Bucephalus, took hold of him, not round the body, but as if he had been a doll, by both hands, and throwing him up in the air, caught him as one catches a ball.

The baronet did not much care for these liberties. "

No sooner did Norbert pause in his acrobatic feats than his companion did the same to him, with all the while a most serious and offended air, which amused Norbert greatly.

"It is not without reason that madmen are called *lunatics*," thought the baronet. "Can it be possible that only a few hours' sojourn on the moon has had such an effect on a mind like Norbert's. For it is evident that he has lost his senses, and he is as strong as a bull with it all. So am I; indeed, I have never seen myself in such good form as I am now. It must be owing to the physical education at Eton. Something always remains of such a training, and it only requires opportunity to bring it forth. But I trust I am not going to lose my head like this poor fellow."

He had got so far in his reflections when Norbert seized him round the waist, and, throwing him over his shoulder like a bundle of feathers, ran with all his might along the terrace formed by the lip of the crater.

The baronet, somewhat alarmed and much offended by this exploit, struggled with the energy of despair. Norbert would not let go. He stopped only at the end of the terrace, and set down Sir Bucephalus, who was crimson with rage.

"I am surprised, sir," he tried to say.

But seeing that he was unheard, he stopped short. The extreme absurdity of the situation suddenly overcame him, and his rage evaporating under Norbert's affectionate smile, Sir Bucephalus went off into a peal of laughter that shook his sides, but made not a sound.

CHAPTER XXIX.—THE CRATER OF RHETICUS.

"THE chief point now," said Norbert to himself, as he sat beside Sir Bucephalus on the edge of the terrace formed by the crater, "is to ascertain the condition of the isolating base of our great artificial magnet! If, by good chance, it is intact, so much the better! We might then have some reasonable hope of seeing Earth again! Well! well! we shall soon see!"

So saying, he got upon his feet, followed by the baronet, and they resumed their exploration of the crater, keeping always to the circular summit that was now capped by the Peak of Tehbali.

A walk of a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes brought them to a point exactly opposite, but much lower than the observatory. On a sudden they perceived a wide opening in the side of the mountain.

On looking closer, Norbert saw at once that the opening was, in fact, an old cleft in the side of the crater, and that it was now closed in at the top, as by a ceiling, by the vitrified base of the mountain of Tehbali. He hailed the discovery as one likely to settle the point that was now occupying his attention, and at once entered the V shaped cavern, Sir Bucephalus closely following in his footsteps.

At first they could distinguish nothing, owing to the comparative obscurity, but when their eyes got accustomed to the twilight they found themselves in an immense cavity—none other, indeed, than the cavity of the crater of Reticus. It was cup shaped at the bottom, and covered over at the top by a solid arched vault.

In order to make sure of the fact, Norbert lit some matches he had in his pocket, and held them up as high as he could. The light reflected from the top proved conclusively that the roof was in very truth the vitrified glass base of the mountain of Tehbali that had thus capped the lunar crater.

There was so little doubt about it that even the baronet was struck by it.

"Upon my word!" he cried, "the whole mountain is intact, and sits on the top of the crater just like a large lump of sugar!"

Marvelous to relate, Norbert *heard* this exclamation quite distinctly, notwithstanding that it had been uttered from behind a copper mask!

There was only one possible explanation of the phenomenon.

"Turn off the tap of your respirator," said Norbert, setting the example. "We have as much air here as we want!"

"Hurrah!" shouted Sir Bucephalus. "I am very glad to give up my feeding bottle; but how do you account for the fact that we can only talk and breathe by fits and starts in this absurd country?"

"Quite easily," replied Norbert, laughing. "Don't you see that we are in an air cavern?" Making a rapid mental calculation, he added: "This cavern is quite a thousand or twelve hundred yards in diameter, and almost as deep; this gives us a provision of several millions of inches of air!"

"Really! Well, I do call this a good find! It is worth more than a diamond mine! What a comfort it is, at last, to be able to draw a good breath!"

"Yes," answered Norbert. "But we must husband our riches. They will not be inexhaustible."

"Why on earth, or rather in the moon," said the baronet, "is this crater the sole storehouse of breathable air?"

"By the same reason that accounts for our presence here, and also confirms my theory of the matter," answered Norbert. "The air here is not proper to the moon. It is terrestrial air collected by the moon, when, like a ball rolling in flour, she rolled into our atmosphere. This crater had just

filled with air when it was suddenly capped, that is to say, corked up by the rock of Tehbali. It is this modicum of earth's air that we are now breathing."

"In that case," said the baronet pensively, "we must indeed be sparing of this unexpected treasure!"

"Not only sparing of it, but we must prevent its escaping by the opening that gave us ingress! We had better go back to the observatory as quickly as possible for tools to build it up tight; else the air will escape little by little."

This wise advice was at once put into practice.

The two explorers resumed their masks, and were turning back to the opening, when Norbert proposed an amendment.

"There is not an instant to lose," he said, "for each minute costs us hundreds of gallons of air. Why need we both go back? One of us could fetch what tools we shall want whilst the other remains here and sets to work at once."

"That's true," replied Sir Bucephalus. "Do you go, then, my dear fellow, since you know exactly what is needed. But what can I do in your absence?"

"You can gather together a lot of stones, wherewith to make a wall and close up the opening when I come back."

"Very well. There is no lack of stones here. You shall have a good heap here on your return, I promise."

Satisfied with this assurance, Norbert bounded off to the observatory, and was there in a few minutes.

As soon as they all heard the news, every one wanted to join the expedition. The doctor, Virgil, Smith, Fatima, and even Gertrude were all anxious to become assistant masons.

Smith had laid out a splendid lunch for the explorers on their return. But it was settled to postpone the repast for another hour, as Norbert did not think it would take longer to close the opening.

He had already given his instructions to Virgil, who had hurried off to the storeroom in search of a shovel, a trowel, a sack of cement, and a barrel of water.

Meanwhile all prepared for the adventure by providing themselves with oxygen respirators, and Norbert warned his companions of the singular phenomena that awaited them outside.

Briet's countenance lengthened considerably when he heard that he was about to be condemned to absolute silence.

Gertrude took it all in her usual courageous way.

"What is that majestic planet that has appeared since your departure?" she asked, going to the window to point out to Norbert a large pale white crescent in the heavens similar in appearance to the new moon when viewed from the earth, only four times as large.

"That is our country, the earth!" he replied. "We shall have the pleasure of constantly seeing her, for she is the great time piece of the lunar world; she is always present in the heavens, and in this hemisphere she is visible all day and all night."

"The earth!" said Gertrude, with a sigh. "To think that my poor

darling father is there so far from us, exposed to the horrors of a siege, and little dreaming that his daughter has been exiled to this place !”

They went out on the esplanade, and for the first few minutes there was some confusion. Norbert had warned them of the new conditions they might expect to find outside ; but the two servants had failed to take in all his explanations. Their abnormal lightness was a great trouble to them. They conducted themselves as if seized with an acute nervous fever.

Virgil, wishing to look over the edge of the esplanade, was carried by his own impetus to a distance of forty yards at least.

“ This will be my death ! ” he thought, as he flew through space. “ Or at all events, I shall be dreadfully hurt ! ” he continued, picking himself up most carefully when he had reached the ground.

No such thing ! He was not even bruised !

As he turned round in amazement to measure the distance which he had traversed, a tolerably heavy mass came flying toward him. It was Smith, falling off the esplanade in his turn, led by the force of example probably. He fell atop of Virgil !

“ This fellow will smash me ! ” thought Virgil. But Smith proved as light as a feather, and did no harm whatever.

This experience taught them to moderate their movements in proportion to the work to be done. They now hastened to join the others, and were soon at the mouth of the cavern.

CHAPTER XXX.—A STRANGE INTRUSION.

HERE a painful surprise awaited them. The baronet was not there, although a large heap of stones attested the ardor with which he must have worked.

Norbert, thinking that he might have gone to get a few mouthfuls of fresh air in the crater, penetrated further in, calling him loudly.

The subterranean echoes alone replied.

Considerably alarmed, he lit several matches in succession, and began an exploration of the hole ; but he had not gone ten paces before the uselessness of the proceeding came home to him.

The hollow interior of the crater descended in a gentle slope, so that there was no fear of a dangerous fall. On the other hand, Sir Bucephalus could not have ventured on a useless exploration without a light.

It seemed, therefore, certain that he was not in the crater, and he must in all probability, have been tempted to visit one of the neighboring valleys.

“ Sir Bucephalus is not there,” said Norbert to Smith, who had followed him anxiously. “ You had better go and see if you can find him. Meanwhile, we will commence work here, for there is not a minute to lose, and every instant’s delay costs us much precious air.”

Smith obeyed, and the rest set to work vigorously.

Virgil had already deposited the water and cement in a hole dug with the shovel, and, mixing the cement, he now laid it on the wall that was rapidly rising under Norbert’s hands. The doctor picked up the stones, and Ger-

trude and Fatima passed them with a hearty laugh at their own unaccustomed strength.

"Look," said Gertrude, holding out a rock that would have weighed a ton on the earth. "Is this little stone of any use to you?"

The work proceeded as rapidly as if Titans were the builders.

In a few minutes the wall reached to the foot of Tehbali, and as the plaster solidified at once on account of the extreme dryness, their task was completed.

Smith came back then, and signified by heart broken gestures that he had not found the baronet.

After an instant's reflection Norbert resolved to give the signal to return to the observatory.

"Perhaps," he thought, "Sir Bucephalus may have gone by another route, or he may be back soon."

There was no baronet to be seen in the drawing room, as they had hoped, but there were traces of his appetite. The lunch left on the table was half gone. Cold meat, ham, wine, biscuits, and dessert, had all been laid under contribution.

In truth, Sir Bucephalus could not have eaten all that had disappeared. He must have taken some of it away with him.

"I dare say," said the doctor, "that finding something interesting at the foot of the mountain, he hurried back to it at once."

The explanation seemed plausible, and was accepted by the company in default of any other solution. They took their seats at table without further delay.

"Well, we are glad to have found a good supply of air in that cave," said the doctor, when he had somewhat satisfied his appetite. "But how will you manage to utilize it, my dear Mauny, now that, like another Eolus, you have succeeded in imprisoning it in your cavern? Do you intend to send us there for change of air now and then, just as I used to pack my patients off to Monte Carlo in those happy days when I did not practise on the moon? Or do you mean to put the air into barrels and transport it here?"

"My plan is much simpler," answered Norbert. "You know that I began by boring a well down the middle of the mountain. If the bottom of the well is put into communication with the air reservoir, and a ventilator fitted to one of these windows, the whole of the observatory will have a sufficient supply."

"It is a good idea. But are you not afraid of being too generous with that precious air? Would it not be more prudent to restrain the supply to what is absolutely necessary, by passing it through rubber or leaden tube furnished with a tap? The tube would have to be of a considerable length, though, and probably you have not got such a thing in store."

"We have all that we require," replied Norbert.

"There has not been much to complain of hitherto," said the doctor. "But it is really painful not to be able to exchange one's thoughts outside this observatory! A bright idea occurred to me a little while ago. Why shouldn't we learn the deaf and dumb language?"

"Where shall we find its alphabet?" said Norbert. "I own that I never thought of providing that, and perhaps the omission was a mistake on my part."

"Perhaps we can devise a substitute," rejoined the doctor. "I used to know it pretty well, once upon a time, and it is much easier than is generally supposed. One has only to remember the conventional finger signs that stand for the twenty four letters of the alphabet; it is much easier for us than for poor children who have never had their sight or hearing, and do not know their letters. See! 'This is how the letter A is shown.'"

The doctor proceeded to teach them all the other letters of the alphabet in succession. He took out his note book and drew the signs on it in pencil.

"I don't know how it is," he resumed, "but it is a curious fact that a little thing of this sort sometimes remains for years in a corner of the memory, much like a bundle of letters in an old drawer, and is ready for use when occasion offers. We must have fresh signs if I have forgotten any."

They all proved good pupils, and gesticulated in praiseworthy concert. Norbert, glancing at Virgil, thought that even he was trying to learn the mute language. The soldier stood on the threshold of the office gesticulating wildly.

But, on a sudden, his master saw that his signs were genuine attempts to attract notice. He was blinking his eyes, and making despairing gestures from behind Gertrude's chair, as if to intimate to his master that he had something serious and special to communicate to him in private and as soon as possible.

Norbert gave him a look to show that he understood, and left the table soon after, pretending that he had to take the time of a chronometer in the Hall of Telescopes.

"There are thieves here, sir," Virgil whispered.

"Thieves! What do you mean?"

"I have just found the store room quite demolished. The canned goods biscuits, sugar, coffee, everything is gone! We have been robbed of tons. Everything is upset, the drawers left open, and the cases empty on the floor. One would think a troop of Arabs must have been there. And it was all done while we were at the foot of the Peak. For I was the last to leave the storeroom with a barrel of water, and I find it in this state on my return!"

"Might it not have been done by Sir Bucephalus?"

"Sir Bucephalus? He couldn't have carried off all that is missing! It must have been the work of eight or ten men, depend upon it. Besides, Sir Bucephalus has not been in, I think, and he has not touched the lunch table."

"What makes you think so?"

"Everything. The way in which the ham is cut, the meats hacked about, so unlike the orderly, methodical habits of the English. We servants notice these little matters. And, then, he has a good appetite, certainly; but he could not have eaten such a lot! Besides, his dinner napkin has not been unfolded, and his plate is quite clean. No, no. Believe me, sir, Sir Bucephalus has not been in."

"But what do you infer?"

"I don't know. I can only think that thieves have been here within the last hour or half hour, and they have carried off not only an enormous quantity of provisions, but also——"

"What?"

"Arms and ammunition! My rifle, which stood behind the door of the storeroom, and the doctor's rifle that was hanging up in the drawing room. He has not noticed its absence, but I did."

CHAPTER XXXI.—ONLY CATALEPSY.

AFTER ascertaining the state of things in the storeroom, and finding that Virgil had in no wise exaggerated, Norbert called Briet into the Hall of Telescopes, to take counsel with him and his faithful servant.

Who were those strange thieves, that they should pounce upon the provisions, and leave the baronet's splendid plate untouched? That circumstance alone seemed to point to the probability of the theft having been committed by an animal, or a troop of unknown animals, rather than by a human being.

On the other hand, the disappearance of the firearms must have been the work of intelligent though mischievous beings. Anyhow, it was most important to find out the truth, and also to organize a search party for the baronet.

As the expedition had its dangers, it was settled that Gertrude and Fatima should be left behind in charge of Smith. The doctor and Virgil, armed to the teeth, accompanied Norbert.

The model valet was told of this decision, and strictly enjoined not to disquiet the ladies left to his protection, as they were not to know the reason of the sortie. He was, however, to lock the door, and to have loaded firearms at hand, and not to admit any one without good cause.

Having taken these precautions, our three explorers hastened to equip themselves for the adventure, filled their breechloaders with explosive bullets, and put on their respirators. Then they bid good by to Gertrude under pretext of going out to look for the baronet.

"Where shall we begin!" asked the doctor.

"I am inclined to go towards the Sea of Serenity," replied Norbert.

"The sea!" cried Fatima, clapping her hands. "Oh, how I should like to see it, and, above all, to bathe in it, as at Suakim!"

"Don't be in such a hurry, Fatima," said Norbert. "There is no water in this sea."

"No water in a sea?"

"No, my child; there is not a drop on the whole surface of the moon, nor even in its atmosphere. We should suffer terribly from thirst if we had not a good supply in store, which saves us, at least that torment. As to the sea of which I speak, it is, like all the others in this world, simply a sandy plain."

"Then why call them seas?" asked Gertrude.

"Because the first astronomers who discovered them, a hundred and fifty or two hundred years ago, took them for seas, as in conformation they much resemble the probable appearance of the beds of our oceans, supposing the waters had dried up. But I will tell you more about it on our return, as I shall certainly take the opportunity of studying the question more closely than has yet been done."

"Well, go quickly in that case," said Gertrude, "or you will be overtaken by night; for it must now be two or three o'clock in the afternoon. I can't tell exactly, because all our clocks and watches have stopped."

"There is no fear of night coming," said Norbert, laughing. "Unless I am very much out in my calculations, we can look forward to something like two hundred and sixty four hours of daylight."

"Is it possible? Are the days so long as that in the moon?"

"They last at least fourteen times twenty four hours. There are only twelve days throughout the lunar year."

"And are we not to sleep during all that period?" asked Fatima, in dismay.

"Nothing prevents our sleeping. In fact, we must make a point of having fixed hours for repose, on account of our terrestrial habits. We must sleep in the day time, that is all."

"And will the nights, when they come, be equally long?"

"Quite. During fourteen times twenty four hours we shall only have the light of the stars and of the earth."

"How strange it will be!" cried Fatima.

"Not stranger than the long polar nights and days in the arctic regions of the terrestrial globe. But meanwhile we must proceed to our exploration. Come, doctor, let us start. Virgil, have you the maps, compass, barometers, and all necessities?"

"Yes, sir."

"One word more," implored the doctor. "How will the barometer behave here?"

"Just as it does on earth, or nearly so. That enables us to keep our provision of air, and go about with impunity in the rarefied atmosphere of the moon."

"If it is so rarefied, how is it that the barometric tension is the same as that to which we are used?"

"The lunar atmosphere is much higher than that of the earth. That accords with the lesser intensity of the weight of the surface of this world, and explains how it is that the lunar atmosphere is invisible from the earth. All the facts fit in. But enough! Let us go now, once for all."

They went down the road and the slope of the great crater, and were soon in the plain strewn with smaller volcanoes. They crossed it without stopping, and, in going towards the southwest, came before long to the edge of a vast sandy bed.

It extended to the horizon, and, as the young astronomer had foreseen, was exactly like the Sahara; with the exception, however, that no oasis was visible, and the solar light was more intense than in the African desert.

Had there been a single individual, alive or dead, throughout this vast expanse he would have been seen ten leagues off. But not the least vestige of animate or inanimate life disturbed the solitude.

"Let us go back and look in the Apennines," wrote Norbert, passing his note book to his companions.

The great chain of mountains stretched from northwest to west. It was composed of ranges of peaks, rising to the height of ten thousand feet above the Sea of Serenity. Mauny, Dr. Briet, and Virgil accomplished the first part of the ascent in less than an hour. It was not very easy walking, but the three travelers explored it all thoroughly, climbing manfully terrace after terrace, until at length they stood on a summit, whence they commanded a view of both slopes quite sixty leagues in extent.

Vainly did they sweep the immense circle with their glasses. The solitude was as complete as the bottom of the dried up lunar ocean.

Norbert had just lowered the glass, and was about to give the signal for return, when his attention was caught by a pyramidal rock surmounting the height on which he stood. He went up to it. It had evidently been placed there by a human hand.

It was rough, but was wedged carefully in, and propped up with stones to prevent it rocking. And to obviate all doubt as to its origin, the following inscription, done with a knife, was to be seen on one side :

SIR BUCEPHALUS COGHILL,

THE FIRST MAN

THAT EVER CLIMBED THESE

MOUNTAINS.

"Well, to be sure!" said Norbert, laughing, as he pointed out the inscription to the doctor. "It was to write his name here, then, that the baronet gave us all the slip. We shall find him safe and sound, depend upon it, when we return. Who would have accused him of such a freak of vanity?"

With their minds at rest the three explorers set off homeward down a new road. It was a kind of deep gorge, that led straight to the crater of Rheticus, and was probably the bed of some ancient torrent that had forced its way to the sea.

It was shady and cool, and best of all, they could actually hear the sound of their own footsteps, which showed that they must have hit upon a stratum of air.

Norbert hastened to verify the fact by taking off his oxygen respirator. But he had to put it on again quickly. The floating modicum of air was not of sufficient density to suffice for animal life.

On the other hand there was no trace of vegetable existence. The stratum of air was probably a remnant of the earth's atmosphere that had been imprisoned in these depths. So reasoned Norbert.

The ancient torrent skirted the base of Rheticus, and consequently that also of Tehbali, and brought them back to the observatory on the opposite side from that by which they had left it. They seized the opportunity of inspecting that part of the Peak.

As they passed along the road that ran past the tomb of the dwarf of Rhadameh, a most unexpected sight met their eyes.

The stone closing the tomb had fallen down, and the corpse lay exposed to view in the hollow of the rock where it had been deposited.

Norbert and Virgil instinctively turned away from the sight and began to lift up the stone in order to replace it. But the doctor went up to the body and examined it with scientific curiosity. All at once he stooped, took the dead man's hand, and looked intently at a red patch on it that appeared to have been the effect of the sun's heat.

Turning back to his companions, and seeing that they were evidently surprised, the doctor wrote on a page of his note book:

"A corpse burned by the sun! Such a thing was never yet seen! It is too preposterous, even in the moon!"

Norbert was aware of the physiological truth that there is no more certain sign of death than the fact that the skin is insensible to burning.

The doctor took up his stethoscope and put it to the dead man's chest.

Alas! He suddenly bethought himself that there was no sound on the moon, and therefore the absence of all noise in the heart was no proof. So he hastened to uncover the wizened wrist and felt it with the palm of his own hand.

There was a very feeble pulsation, scarcely perceptible, but still unmistakable.

Before Norbert and Virgil, who stood by, lost in amazement, could make out what the doctor was about, he caught up the dwarf as if he had been a baby, and ran off with him to the observatory.

The doctor passed quickly through the Hall of Motors, and, rushing to his room, laid the dwarf on his own bed and actually went to work to scrub him vigorously from head to foot with a clothes brush.

At the same time he inflated the lungs of the supposed corpse by blowing down a silver tube which he had taken out of his surgical case and inserted in Kaddour's mouth, having first, with his forceps, pulled forward the singularly shriveled tongue.

Norbert saw the dwarf slowly coming back to life. His breathing became stronger, and he twisted and turned, coughed and sneezed under the brisk manipulation of the brush, which left him red as a boiled lobster.

At last he opened his eyes, and faintly murmured in French:

"Something to drink."

Norbert wondered if he were in a dream. Yet there was no room for doubt. There, before his very eyes, was the dwarf of Rhadameh, who had been buried fifteen days back, now all alive, speaking, breathing like any one else!

The doctor was too busy to be spoken to. After he had well rubbed his patient, he made him breathe pure oxygen, and poured half a glass of wine down his throat. Exhausted with his hard work, the worthy man then swallowed a bumper himself, and wiped his forehead with a self-satisfied air.

"At last!" cried Norbert, no longer able to suppress his impatience. "Will you explain this mystery?"

"Explain it? Nothing simpler," said the doctor, laughing. "This is a case of catalepsy. I have long known that certain Indian jugglers and fakirs could do it, but I have never before had an opportunity of witnessing the phenomenon. I am very glad to have seen it. You are witness that the fellow bore all the appearance of death, and was buried for—how long?"

"Thirteen days, unless I mistake."

"That is less than the fakir of Ceylon mentioned by Dr. Sterk as having been buried for six months."

"Six months or six days is much the same," said Norbert, "for the phenomenon is as extraordinary in the one case as the other. How is it accounted for?"

"By a most simple process of progression. The Indian fakirs and jugglers begin by accustoming themselves to live with the minimum of vital force, through their habit of remaining motionless for long periods of time. They practise holding their breath; they live in boxes that are more or less hermetically sealed, first for hours, then for days, and finally for weeks or months.

"More than that, they manage to fill their stomach, as if it were a store-room, with atmospheric air that they can afterward pass into their lungs by minute doses at a time. To effect this, the string of their tongue is cut, so that they can turn it back and close their windpipe at will. They know how to hypnotize themselves by looking fixedly at the top of their nose; and by contracting the thoracic muscles, they can so stop the movement of the heart that it is imperceptible. They also have poisons in their possession that are unknown to the European pharmacy, and that can produce all the aforesaid effects instantaneously. You see how easily all these combined agents can simulate the appearance of death."

Norbert listened to these explanations with deep interest, but his interest was nothing compared to that of Kaddour. He was quite himself again, and was now taking in, with wide open eyes and ears, every word of the doctor.

The latter at last perceived this, and dropped the subject for the present, reserving it for the drawing room, when the person principally concerned should not be at hand.

"Well, my boy," he said, patting the dwarf on the head, affectionately and professionally, "we are certainly much better. But there must be no more of these pranks, because they would not answer nor take us in now! Virgil will give you a cup of soup presently, with a glass of claret. After that you must take a nap, and wake up quite well."

Really, to hear the doctor speak, one would have thought that he was addressing the most virtuous and charming patient, instead of a wicked deformity, who had barely escaped a well merited capital sentence by feigning to poison himself. But such is the strength of the medical sense of what is fitting in the practice of the profession, that every other consideration is lost in the single minded care for the patient, and rich or poor, honest man or criminal, are all one in their eyes so long as they need a doctor.

And such is the strength of example, that every one in the observatory acted likewise. They all forgot the crimes of Kaddour, and only looked

upon him first as a singular phenomenon, then, after some hours had passed by, as a brother in misfortune, another exile from Earth.

Every one hastened to show him little attentions as soon as he was able to rise and go into the Hall of Telescopes, where a hammock was slung for him.

The dwarf was morosely silent at first, and did not apparently appreciate their kindness. The doctor alone seemed to find grace in his eyes, and he appeared glad to hear his voice.

But when he saw that the genial sympathy was real, and not affected—when he understood that his crimes were forgiven, and that he was treated like a friend—he was so overcome at last by so much generosity that one day he gave proof of the fact by bursting into tears.

This proved the signal for a complete change in his manners and conduct. He did not speak any more, but his old expression of morose defiance gave place to one of sadness, of almost gentleness. It was evident that a chord had been touched in that hard heart.

A. Laurie.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

UNCLE BENJAMIN'S PAST.

Tells how fate played into lovers' hands—Mr. Doble's flight from fancied peril lands him at the very feet of Nemesis—The good an ill wind blew.

"NOW, Larry, don't try to argue this matter with me. I know what is best for you. Marriage and ruin are synonymous. The prospect is alluring, no doubt; but realization is worse than long contracts and a steadily falling market. What you call 'love' is merely a sort of brain fever that perturbs the senses and obscures reason. It lasts only a few months. Marriage cures it. Then you inevitably hate the medicine—your wife."

"But, my dear uncle, you and I both know lots of couples who have, for many years, lived happily together."

"No. They have heroically endured each other. Their supposed happiness is a delusion. Matrimony's martyrs do not always advertise themselves. Do you suppose a man whose wife's extravagance has brought him to the verge of bankruptcy is going to proclaim to his creditors his precarious position? Do you imagine your neighbor, who has perhaps had a nine inch dinner plate cracked on his skull, by the gentle partner of his bosom, will come down town and tell you about it?"

"Nelly would neither be extravagant nor crack plates on my skull. You would know that if you were acquainted with her."

"Why, no, I wouldn't. How could I be sure of such a thing? Her appearance might encourage a sanguine person to hope that her inherent capacity for mischief might not take those particular forms of manifestation, but the finite mind is impotent when it attempts to forecast feminine possibilities. You don't want to take any such chances."

"But I do. I would marry Nellie in the face of every imaginable risk. It would break my heart to give her up."

"That remark only shows the severity of your fever—nothing more. Why should you marry? Now, at all events. You are in receipt of a good income as manager of my business; will be admitted to a junior partnership next year if you go on as well as you have been doing; and when I die you will be Doble & Co. Then, if you have another attack of the fever, you will be in a position to humor expensive and hazardous whims, and, if you are prudent meanwhile, will be able to make such rational selection of a Mrs. Chester as would be impossible now."

"I don't see why I should. Risk is inherent in the venture at any time—according to you."

"So it is; so it is, my boy. The risk is always there; but I have thought of a way in which it may be minimized. You were with me, last week, when I bought a horse. Did I take a young, unbroken, untried animal, simply on its good looks? I should say not. I bought one that had an established record, and a good report from the preceding owner for soundness and gentle disposition. I also, it is true, got a guarantee from the seller, and that is something nobody can give with a wife; but barring that, the principle is the same. Instead of marrying this girl you have your mind set on now, let some other fellow take that risk. Keep an eye on her and see how she turns out, what sort of a wife she makes. If she proves sound, capable, free from vice, you will be comparatively safe in marrying her when he dies."

The young man's face reddened with indignation. He could not trust himself to reply, but, springing up from his chair, rushed out of the little private office in which he had been holding this conversation with his uncle. The old gentleman, Mr. Benjamin Doble, was a merchant in coffees, teas, and sugar; a stout little man, smoothly shaven, bald, very precise in his ways, fixed in his notions, and rich. A more confirmed misogamist than he did not live, and when his nephew, Lawrence Chester—for whom he had a truly paternal regard—evinced a desire to plunge into what he deemed the perilous sea of matrimony, he naturally did his best to dissuade the rash young man. But his really kind intent did not seem to make his opposition seem any the less a hardship to Larry. As for his atrocious theory for conservation of the maximum of approximate safety in marrying, it will be readily imagined that Larry said nothing about it in his interview, a few hours later, with his fiancée, Miss Nelly McBride.

It had been fully understood between the young people that Mr. Doble's consent to their marriage was almost an essential. Larry, who was of an independent and somewhat impetuous disposition, and too deeply in love to be judicious, would have married at once, taking all possible risks of his uncle's serious displeasure, but Nelly was more prudent and would not consent to such a rash proceeding.

"No, dear," she argued. "You might, as you say, procure other employment—though, in these dull times, the chances are against you. But think how long it would be, in a strange place, before you could gain such a position as you have now. And perhaps you might never attain such prospects as are now almost a certainty for you. It might doom you to a life time of struggling if we were to marry in defiance of your uncle. I will wait

for you a year—five years—ten, if necessary ; I will never marry anybody else ; but we must not antagonize Uncle Benjamin."

"I believe your business sense is better than mine, my darling, but I love you so that throwing away the best years of our lives, just to humor an old man's whim, is very hard."

"Yes, it is hard. What can have made him so bitter against marriage? I suppose he never was in love himself."

"Uncle Benjamin in love ! It would be almost as easy to imagine him with wings. Oh, no. The popular notion that every old bachelor has a love romance rankling in his heart does not apply to Uncle Benjamin. He is so just because he was made that way. And he has been confirmed, no doubt, by observation of unhappy marriages. From particular instances of undesirable wives, he has generalized that all women are alike."

"But I would not ruin you, Larry. I am not extravagant."

"I don't doubt that, and I do not think you are likely to break nine inch dinner plates on my skull."

"Oh, Larry ! Did he say I would do that? What an awful old man !"

"He didn't exactly affirm that you would do it, but suggested it as among the possibilities."

"I'm sure he would never say such a horrid thing if he knew me."

"No, of course he wouldn't. But he does not know you, and never will if he can help it."

Nelly cogitated a few moments and then asked, "Did you tell him whom you proposed to marry?"

"No. He never gave me a chance. Mentioning marriage to him was like shaking a red flag at a bull ; it set him off at once."

"You're sure you did not mention my name?"

"I believe I spoke of you as Nelly, that was all."

"Then I shall make the acquaintance of His Ursine Highness and try if I cannot tame him."

"How will you get at him?"

"Your note yesterday came in one of your uncle's business envelopes, and mother noticing it recalled that her dearest confidential friend when she was a school girl was Aurelia Ann Doble. They had not met, she said, in twenty years, and she wondered if this Benjamin Doble could be related to her Aurelia Ann."

"Related ? Why, she's his sister."

"So I imagined."

"She keeps house for him and is an old maid, with a will of her own and quite free in declaring it, but one of the kindest hearted and best women alive. But I hardly see——"

"You will in a minute. Mother will do anything I say. I intend that she shall call upon your aunt Aurelia Ann, renew their old friendship, and, if possible, procure an invitation for me to remain here in New York, with your aunt, for a fortnight, instead of going back home to Beverly with mother. I'm not through sightseeing yet, you know."

"Splendid! I can come up to see you every evening and——"

"Indeed, you will do nothing of the sort. It must not even be suspected that we are acquainted until I make up my mind upon Aunt Aurelia's probable attitude. And I must caution mother not to mention your name. Give me two weeks' chance at Uncle Benjamin and, as we say up in Yankeeland, I'll either 'make a spoon or spoil a horn.' It's true, he may only abhor me as a schemer when he finds out, but even at that he couldn't think any worse of me than that I would break plates on your skull."

* * * * *

As Lawrence said nothing more about getting married, Uncle Benjamin erroneously supposed the idea abandoned, and rather plumed himself secretly upon his success in persuading relinquishment of the pernicious purpose.

Several days after that matter had been so satisfactorily disposed of, Uncle Benjamin settled himself after luncheon in the depths of the big morocco lined chair in his private office, for his customary siesta, when one of the clerks brought him word that a lady, who announced herself as "Mrs. Doble," was in the store and desired to see him.

"Who?" he shouted, sitting bolt upright and very wide awake in an instant.

"Mrs. Doble, sir, was the name she gave."

"Nonsense! It's Miss Doble, my sister;" though he wondered why she had come to the store.

"Oh, no, sir. I know Miss Doble by sight. This is a tall, fine looking woman, richly dressed, a blonde——"

"Keep her out! I won't see her! Send her away! Tell her I won't be back in a year—that I'm dead—anything——" cried Uncle Benjamin, waving his hands as if to keep off a specter. But by the time the clerk had reached the door, his fear gave him a new inspiration and he called, "No. Hold on! That wouldn't do. She'd force her way in anyhow. She must be let in. But, delay her; keep her out a few minutes—make some excuse."

The clerk went out, closing the door behind him. In an instant Uncle Benjamin jumped to his feet, snatched up his hat, slapped it on the back of his head and sprang to the back window. Cautiously he raised the sash and peered out. The stone paved area was a good twelve feet below, on a level with the cellar floor, too far for him to risk jumping. But if he could get down there and into the cellar, he might escape into the street while she was being ushered into the empty office. A new coil of rope—procured to repair a hoistway—lay in one corner of the office. He dragged it out, cut the lashings, made one end fast to a safe handle, and tossed the rest of it out of the window. In another half minute he had gone down it, hand under hand, like an acrobat. Here he found himself in a trap. The iron shutters of the cellar windows were closed and, though he kicked at them in frenzy, he could not make himself heard by the porters, who were no doubt in the store above. And every moment he dreaded to see that woman's head thrust out of the window above him. Looking about, almost in despair, he caught sight of the window of a banana cellar, open for the ventilation of the ripening fruit, and plunged into it.

The Italian proprietor, startled by his advent, uttered a cry of alarm and then an exclamation of profound astonishment as he recognized his dignified and wealthy neighbor, the coffee merchant, but Uncle Benjamin heeded him not. He paused not an instant for explanation or apology, but dashed through to the front steps, up them to the street, around the corner to the nearest hack stand, and thence had himself swiftly carried home.

The amazement of the clerk, when he eventually showed the lady into the vacated office, is not to be described. As for "Mrs. Doble," she seemed more indignant than surprised. That which most overwhelmed the young man—his employer having been able to climb out of the window and down the rope—did not seem to impress her as remarkable. Her attention was concentrated upon the fact that he had taken flight rather than meet her.

"Tell him," she said, as she turned to go, "that Mrs. Doble is not a woman to be treated with such disrespect and will come again."

Those last three words she uttered in a very awful tone of voice, as the clerk duly reported to Lawrence when he came in a few minutes later.

Larry was almost stunned. So there was a Mrs. Doble! A dreadful Mrs. Doble, whom Uncle Benjamin would risk his neck to avoid.

He had a past and nobody had ever suspected it!

* * * * *

Uncle Benjamin's flight had been instinctive, quite natural—he said to himself—as anybody knowing the circumstances would admit. But he could not go on like that, climbing out of the back window every time that woman raided his office. And she might take it into her head to hunt him up at his home. Aurelia would have to be put upon her guard not to admit her. And Aurelia would probably ask questions. Oh, what a bother it all was! Why not go away to Europe for a year or two? That was worth thinking of.

Aurelia Ann was a little alarmed by his coming home at such an unusual hour, but he told her,

"I do not feel quite as well as usual; it is nothing serious, however. All I want is a good rest. I am going up to bed at once and must not be disturbed, no matter who comes."

The only person who called to see him during the evening was Lawrence, who was exceedingly anxious to have an interview, but Aunt Aurelia dutifully barred the way.

"He did not feel well," she said, "and has gone to bed, leaving word that he would not see anybody tonight, so there is no use talking. Any business you have must wait until morning."

The young man accepted his dismissal demurely, but went away chuckling internally.

Uncle Benjamin slept badly and arose later than usual. He had put on dressing gown and slippers, left his room to go down to breakfast, and was approaching the head of the stairs when he heard the voice of his sister, from the story below, saying to some one:

"My brother will be down soon. It is past his usual hour, and he——"

Whatever else she said he could not hear, for she had passed into the

parlor, accompanying a lady, the train of whose gown he could just barely see.

"Great heavens!" he exclaimed, his hair rising in terror. "She has followed me here already."

Again the mad impulse to flight overcame him. He darted back into his room and almost immediately emerged, wearing shoes and a hat, putting on a coat as he came forth. Down the stairs he did not dare to venture, for the parlor door was open. But above, at this hour, there could be nobody. Rapidly he ascended to the attic and up a steep flight of steps leading to the scuttle; in another minute he stood free on the roof.

Here he had to pause a moment, to get his bearings and remember which house, from this unfamiliar point of view, was that of his friend Jack Roberts, with whom he proposed to take refuge. It was the fifth to his right. One intervening roof was almost his own height above the general level. Under ordinary circumstances it would have seemed an insurmountable obstacle. Now, he did not mind it in the least. How he scrambled up on it, he did not even notice. At that superior elevation he looked ahead and saw, on the roof that was his destination, a girl hanging out clothes to dry. Behind her, the entrance to an attic stairway stood open, and he uttered a shout of joy.

The girl turned at the sound of his voice and, seeing a strange man leap down from the high roof and run toward her, gave a frightened shriek. Uncle Benjamin paid no attention to her, but plunged into the open doorway and down the stairs pursued by her cries of "Thieves! Help!"

"Roberts! Roberts!" he cried as he hurried down to the parlor floor.

"Hello! What is it? Why, Doble! Where in thunder do you come from?" exclaimed the astonished Roberts, emerging from the breakfast room, back of the parlors, with the morning paper in his hand.

"From the roof. Call off that girl. Tell her to shut up. I'll explain directly. Stop her first, for heavens' sake!"

Roberts ran up stairs, shouting "Shut up!" and Uncle Benjamin, out of breath, dizzy, and trembling with excitement and fatigue, staggered into the dining room to find for himself a glass of water. The house was almost as familiar to him as his own, for Jack Roberts and he had been chums for years, and many a game of poker he had played in that back room.

Standing at the sideboard, he had just filled a glass and raised it to his lips, when a feminine voice behind him exclaimed:

"Why, Benjy!"

He dropped the glass and spun around on his heel as upon a pivot, to face the woman who had just entered from the parlor. At sight of her, with a cry of despair, he sank unconscious to the floor.

The lady was looking down at him and laughing when Mr. Roberts returned.

"Oh, Jack!" she cried. "This is too funny for anything. Here's an ex husband turned up that I had quite forgotten."

"The deuce!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean to say you've ever been married to my old friend Ben Doble?"

"Yes. He was my second. He came after Saunders and before Butler,

and Butler preceded you, you know. We only lived together a couple of months, or maybe three, I don't remember exactly. Then he got miffed at some little thing and ran away. I got a divorce on the ground of abandonment, and never saw or heard of him since until now."

"I beg your pardon," interpolated a voice at the door; "I'm looking for my uncle."

"Oh! Come in, Lawrence. You followed his trail, I suppose."

"Yes."

Mr. and Mrs. Roberts, while talking, had tried to revive the little man, but unsuccessfully, and it was deemed best to take him home.

When Uncle Benjamin recovered his senses, he was lying upon a sofa in his own parlor, with Aurelia Ann holding an ammonia bottle to his nose, an unknown but very pretty girl dabbling cologne on his brow, Larry fanning him, and a tall, imposing blonde woman looking on sympathetically.

"What on earth is the matter with you, brother Benjamin?" demanded Aurelia Ann. "What possessed you to go rampaging over the roof to Roberts' at this time in the morning!"

"I did go to Roberts', eh?" he responded feebly. "I thought I did, but the impression seemed to run into a sort of nightmare toward the end. I thought I saw——" he stopped abruptly.

"You saw Mrs. Roberts," said Larry. "I was introduced to her. Mr. Roberts only got home with her last night, from Chicago, where they were married."

Uncle Benjamin sat up, with a bewildered but happier look on his face, exclaiming, "She's Jack's wife now? Then why did she come to the store yesterday and call herself Mrs. Doble?"

"Excuse me," interposed the strange lady. "It was I who called. I am Mrs. Doble, the wife of your brother David, come all the way from Iowa to visit you, only to have you flee from me as if I were a pestilence."

"Oh! My dear sister! Do not think so, I implore you. You are very welcome, but there were certain circumstances—I cannot explain—but I thought you were quite another person. And this morning, when I caught a glimpse only of you, entering the parlor with my sister, I——"

"You caught no such glimpse, Benjamin," interrupted Aurelia Ann. "You were already sprinting over the roofs when Mrs. Doble arrived. The lady you saw with me was Miss McBride," and she waved her hand toward the pretty girl, as a sort of informal introduction.

"Nelly," said Larry in a meaning undertone, close to his uncle's ear.

"Oh!" exclaimed Uncle Benjamin comprehendingly. He looked sharply at her, hesitated, and then with a little half smile, drawing Larry down to him, whispered:

"I will give my consent on one condition."

"Name it."

"That you don't let this story get out on the street."

"Agreed."

"Then—God bless you, my children."

J. H. Connelly.

THE MUTINY ON THE FLYING CLOUD.*

Thrilling experiences among the islands of the Western Pacific—The hostage chosen by the pirates to coerce the first mate—What befell when the Malays attacked the stockade on Refuge Island.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

THE clipper ship *Flying Cloud*, Captain Blake commanding, is en route between New York and Australia, with seven passengers: Dr. Henderson, his wife, little child Lucy and his wife's sister, Sibyl Stanley; also Mr. Grant, a civil engineer, with his wife and seven year old son Percy. After crossing the line the chief mate, Bryce, is lost overboard and Ned Wilson, scarcely twenty, is advanced to the post, while Robert Manners, who is no older, is made second officer. Meantime Josh Williams, one of the able seamen, fomented discontent among the crew and one night Captain Blake and Manners are seized, bound and placed in captivity, while Williams informs Ned Wilson that the price of the safety of the women and children among the passengers is his promise to faithfully navigate the ship to the best of his ability for the mutineers.

Williams proposes to put the passengers ashore on one island and the two ship's officers on another, but several days elapse before land that seems suitable is sighted. Finally one about six miles long is selected and the passengers are sent off in two boats. At the last moment Sibyl Stanley is detained from accompanying her friends, Williams arguing that she must be held to insure Ned's trustworthiness. Captain Blake and Manners are landed on another island, and soon afterwards the *Flying Cloud* is put in at a third one, having a safe harbor between tall cliffs, screening her from all observation. Ned, while off on an exploring trip with Sibyl, finds a cave containing thousands of dollars' worth of gold, a discovery which they determine to keep from the knowledge of the mutineers. Meantime, after Mr. Grant has chanced upon the wreck of a vessel, the *Mermaid*, the party on Refuge Island build a raft, on which to transport the wreck, piecemeal, to the shore, to be utilized in various ways. On one of these journeys they fall in with a canoe containing Captain Blake and Rob Manners, and there is great rejoicing over the reunion. Captain Blake warns them that there are savages in the neighborhood, and they proceed to build a house or fort, out of a quarry they are fortunate enough to find on the island. They plan also to build a cutter, in which to escape, and after the laying of the keel Captain Blake goes fishing on the raft. He falls asleep and when he wakes discovers the sails of a large ship gliding across the face of the moon, just sinking to the horizon. In a wild state of excitement he hoists sail, starts in pursuit, and is overtaken by a frightful storm just as those on the ship are about to take him on board.

CHAPTER XXVII.—THE SUNDERED REFUGEES.

EVERY moment Captain Blake expects to hear, above the noise of the pouring rain, the roar of the tornado that he knows must soon burst upon him. In spite of his desperate peril, he calmly sets to work at once to take what precautions he can against the tempest's shock. With all the coolness and skill of a finished seaman, he lowers the sail on deck and proceeds to secure it as well as he can, for he knows only too well what the next act in the drama will be. He knows, too, that those on board the brig—invisible now—are as well versed as himself, and are at this moment far too busily en-

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gaged in preparing for the stroke of the hurricane to have a thought to spare for him.

Now the rain stops as suddenly as it began, and an awful silence ensues, scarcely broken even by the lap of the water alongside, for the terrific down-pour has completely beaten down the swell, and, save for an occasional gentle heave, the raft lies motionless.

Now stand by! Summon all your nerve and all your courage to your aid, skipper, for you never stood half so sorely in need of them as you do now.

Listen! What is that low murmur in the air, which so rapidly increases in volume until it becomes a deep, hoarse, bellowing roar?

The sound is broad on your starboard beam, skipper! Aft to your steering oar for your life, man; sweep her head round quick, in readiness to run before it! That is well; round with her again; another stroke.

Now stand by! here it comes! Seize that rope's end and hold on for your life!

A long line of milk white foam appears upon the horizon, spreading and advancing with awful rapidity; the roar swells in volume until it becomes absolutely deafening; the air grows thick with vapor; a sudden whirl of wind rushes past, lashing the skipper's face with rain drops as it goes—rain drops? No; they are salt, salt as the brine alongside—and then, with a wild burst of hideous sound and a shock as though the raft had collided with something solid, the hurricane strikes her.

The white water surges up over her stern, and the captain is hurled forward, face downward and half stunned, upon her already submerged deck.

The occupants of the fort retired to rest that night, as usual, soon after sunset; and, thoroughly wearied out with the day's labor, soon sank to sleep.

Nobody felt in the least degree anxious about the skipper, because, when Grant and Henderson took a last look at the weather before turning in, there was nothing particularly alarming in its aspect. They agreed that there was going to be a change, and that it would probably occur before morning; but Blake, they considered, was not the man to be caught napping; moreover, he had already been absent long enough to make his return possible at any moment; so, with this opinion expressed and understood, all hands sought their bunks with perfectly easy minds.

Manners and Nicholls were the first to awake, which they did simultaneously when the hurricane burst over the island, their sleeping room happening to be on the weather side of the fort, or that upon which the gale beat with the greatest fury, and they were therefore naturally the first to be disturbed by the uproar of the storm.

"Whew!" whistled Manners, as he settled himself more comfortably in his cosy bunk. "It's blowing heavily! I'm glad I have no watch to keep tonight. Listen to that!" as the wind went howling and careering past the house, causing it to tremble to its foundations. "If it's like that down here in this sheltered valley, what must it be outside in the open sea?"

"Bad enough, Mr. Manners, you may depend on it," answered Nicholls, who, occupying the adjoining bunk, had overheard this muttered soliloquy, "bad enough! This is the worse storm we've had since we've been on the island. Why—listen to that now! and did ye feel the house shake, sir? Why, it must be blowing a regular tornado—or typhoon, as they calls 'em in these latitudes. The skipper sleeps pretty sound through it, don't he, sir?"

"He does, indeed," replied Manners; and then, a sudden recollection of the fishing expedition coming upon him, he added, "I suppose he *is* asleep—I suppose he is in his berth. Did you hear him come in?"

"Not I, sir," was the answer. "I dozed off to sleep almost before I had time to make myself comfortable, and I never woke until a minute or two since, when the roar of the gale disturbed me."

"Are you awake, Captain Blake?" demanded Manners sharply.

No answer, and both men listen as well as they can through the awful roar and shriek of the gale, hoping to hear the measured breathing of the sleeper. But no such sound is heard; and after listening breathlessly for a few seconds Manners bounds out of his berth, and fumbling about for the matches, finds them at last and strikes a light. The skipper's berth is empty and undisturbed; it has evidently not been slept on that night.

Manners and Nicholls—the latter having also turned out—looked blankly at the bunk and then at each other, the same dreadful suspicion dawning upon them both at the same instant.

"Good heavens!" gasped Manners. "It cannot be that—and yet it looks like it—is it possible, Tom, that the skipper has not returned—that he is at sea on the raft in this awful gale?"

"I'm blest if it don't look uncommon like it, sir," is Nicholls' reply, uttered in a tone of desperate conviction. "Tell ye what 'tis, sir," he continued, as he hastily proceeded to don a garment or two, slipping his bare feet into his shoes as he does so, "I'm off down to the creek to see if the punt is there. If she ain't, you may depend on it she's ridin' at the raft's moorin's—if she ain't swamped—and that the raft's at sea, with the poor skipper aboard of her. The Lord have mercy on him if it is so, that's all I says."

"Stop a minute; I will go with you," says Manners, also hastily dressing; "but before we go we had perhaps better inquire of Mr. Grant or the doctor whether they know anything about him; they are certain to be awake."

A minute later the two men are groping their way along the wall of the courtyard toward Grant's room, in which they can perceive a light. Manners knocks, and instantly receives the response:

"Yes. Who is there?"

"Manners and Nicholls, sir. Do you know anything about the captain, Mr. Grant? He is not with us, and his bunk has not been slept in tonight."

"Stay where you are—I will be out in a moment," is the reply. And almost in the short space of time named Grant emerges.

"Now, then," he demands, somewhat sternly, "what is it you say about the captain? Surely I cannot have heard you right?"

"Indeed I am afraid, sir, you did," answered Manners, by this time in a state of deep distress as the conviction forces itself upon him that the skipper really is missing. "I said, sir, that the captain is not with us, and that his bunk has not been slept in tonight."

"Then God help him, for I fear he is beyond all human aid!" ejaculated the engineer hoarsely. "Have you been down to the creek, yet?" he continued.

"No, sir," says Manners: "we were about to go down there, but I thought it best to speak to you first."

"Quite right," assents Grant; "I will go with you."

The engineer reënters his room, hastily explains the situation to Mrs. Grant, and then, returning, leads the way up the staircase to the roof; that, it will be remembered, being the only mode of exit from the building.

It is not until the three reach this comparatively exposed situation that they at all realize the strength of the gale; but, once there, though the building is surrounded on all sides by the high ground of the ravine through which the river flows, the tempest seizes upon them and beats and buffets them and dashes them hither and thither with such irresistible power and fury that they are in absolute peril of their lives while they remain there, and to avoid being actually hurled off into space they are constrained to go down upon their hands and knees.

To add to their difficulties the darkness is so intense that they can see absolutely nothing; they have to grope their way like blind men, relying solely upon their remembrance of localities for guidance. And, search as they will, they cannot find the exterior ladder by which to descend to the ground outside. It has doubtless been blown away.

This misfortune, however, is soon remedied by the substitution of a rope from the store room for the missing ladder, and with its assistance the three men quickly reach the ground.

Arrived there, they find that their difficulties have only just begun, for they are no sooner clear of the house than, what with the profound darkness and the awful buffeting of the wind, they soon get confused and lose their way.

At length, however, after more than an hour's aimless wandering, they find themselves at the shipyard, which is in quite another direction, and once there, they are enabled, by keeping close along the water's edge, to reach the creek.

As each had by this time expected, the punt is not there; and now any lingering hopes as to the skipper's safety which either of them may have cherished disappears, and in his own mind each mutely gives the poor fellow up as lost.

The punt being missing, there is no means of crossing to the mainland, for the stream, swollen by the recent rain, is rushing past at a speed swift enough to sweep away the strongest swimmer that ever breasted wave, to say nothing of the fact that the gale—which is opposed to the current—has churned and lashed the waters into a sheet of blinding foam.

They can do nothing, therefore, except make an ineffectual effort to light

a fire, in the hope that its blaze, reflected in the sky, may serve as a beacon to their unfortunate friend in the improbable event of his still being alive and within sight of the island ; but this attempt also is frustrated by the wind, which not only renders it impossible for them to kindle a flame, but also sweeps away all their materials as fast as they are gathered.

There is nothing left for them, then, but to wend their way back homeward as best they can and await the dawn of day.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—THE SEARCH FOR THE CAPTAIN.

THE dawn that morning was long in coming, and when at length the gray, murky light slowly forced its way through the overhanging canopy of rent and tattered cloud which obscured the heavens, wreck and destruction everywhere became visible. Grant Island, it is true, had escaped almost unscathed, doubtless owing to its sheltered situation ; but on the main island, thousands of trees were lying prostrate, many of them uprooted, and the rest snapped off close to the ground.

As soon as it was light enough to see anything, Grant, with Henderson this time as a companion, once more made his way down to the creek, but there was nothing to be seen from there. Even the buoy attached to the raft's moorings was invisible ; but just where it ought to be there was a strong ripple on the roughened surface of the water, which seemed to suggest that the buoy, and possibly the swamped punt as well, still remained there, dragged under water by the strength of the current.

It continued to blow very heavily—though not with the same awfully destructive violence which marked the first burst of the hurricane—all that day and part of the ensuing night, when the gale broke, and by sunrise the wind had dropped to a strong breeze. Then once more did the four men set out from the fort in the almost hopeless effort to obtain some clue to the fate of poor Captain Blake.

Descending the outer ladder—which had been discovered on the previous day at some distance from the fort—the search party first made for the creek, from the shore of which—the stream having by this time subsided and its current sunk to its normal speed—they descried not only the buoy marking the moorings of the raft, but also, as they had quite expected, the swamped punt hanging to it.

The latter was promptly secured, Manners swimming out to it with the end of a line from the shore, by means of which the craft was drawn in and grounded upon the beach and bailed out.

The oars having been washed out of her and swept away, the next thing to be done was to work up a new pair—a task which was soon accomplished, since they now had an abundance of suitable material close at hand in the shipyard.

This done, the searchers made their way down stream and crossed to the main island, there separating into two parties, one of which was to skirt the shore to the northward and westward, while the other was to proceed in the opposite direction until the two parties reunited ; their object

being not so much to look out seaward—for they knew that if the raft had missed the island it would by that time be far enough away—but rather to examine the shore for any sign of wreckage or the poor skipper's dead body.

Henderson and Nicholls constituted one party, while Grant and Manners formed the other. They had not only a long, but also a most toilsome journey before them, the difficulty arising chiefly from the nature of the ground they had to traverse, and it occupied them until well on in the afternoon of the following day, both parties camping in the woods for one night—and finding it anything but a pleasant experience. Neither party found anything to throw the least light upon the fate either of the raft or of the unfortunate man who had gone to sea in her; and when at length they met they had at least the negative satisfaction of being able to say that, after a thorough search of the entire seaboard of the island, they had discovered no actual proof that the captain had lost his life.

Very fortunately for them no damage had been done either to the mill or in the shipyard; there was therefore no time lost in making good deficiencies of that kind, and they were consequently enabled to resume and carry on their shipwrights' work forthwith.

Not until a full fortnight after the gale did they finally give up the skipper as lost, young Manners being despatched every morning to the top of the mountain with instructions to remain there all day and maintain a constant lookout, the party still hoping, against their better reason, that after all the raft might have held together, and that Blake might, in such a case, strive to regain the island. But at the expiration of that time they felt that it was useless to hope further, and the watching was discontinued.

Dr. Henderson was the hero of the next adventure which befell the party; and a pretty state of consternation he managed to throw everybody into for the time being, his poor wife and little Lucille especially.

It happened thus. It had been the custom of the party ever since their landing upon the island to observe Sunday as a day of rest, prayers being read both morning and evening, whilst the rest of the day was devoted to such recreation as they thought might legitimately be indulged in.

Manners and Nicholls, after the manner of seamen, usually devoted a great deal of time on this particular day to the patching up of their clothes; whilst the two married men took their wives and the youngsters for tolerably long walks when the weather permitted. When the weather was unfavorable for these walks Grant was in the habit of routing out some interesting book from his large stock and reading from it aloud, whilst Henderson, who was an enthusiastic botanist and chemist, in the privacy of a little laboratory he had managed to fit up, prosecuted his researches into the nature of the various plants and herbs he had collected in former rambles.

They were all thus engaged on the afternoon of a rainy Sunday, about a month after the mysterious disappearance of poor Captain Blake, when the rest of the party was suddenly startled by a loud cry for help from Henderson, the call being instantly repeated twice or thrice in a much weaker tone of voice.

Tossing aside his book and springing to his feet, Grant at once rushed off to the laboratory, with all the others close at his heels, and there they discovered the unfortunate doctor in a most extraordinary state of mind and body, and at the same time became conscious of a faint fragrant odor pervading the atmosphere of the room.

Pale as death, with all his limbs hanging limp as if paralyzed, the poor fellow was huddled up in a chair upon which he had evidently flung himself when the seizure—or whatever it was—first came upon him. His eyes were rolling wildly, and his teeth chattered as though he were suffering from an ague fit. But it was evident that he still retained his reason, for the moment that he saw the little crowd pouring into the room he cried out in a weak but piping voice :

"Fly ! fly for your lives ! My dear fellow," turning to Grant, "*drive* them out ; *throw* them out if they will not go otherwise ! And throw open that window at once ; this atmosphere is *deadly*."

This statement had the desired effect ; the room was cleared promptly, everybody beating a somewhat precipitate retreat but the engineer and Mrs. Henderson, the latter refusing to be removed, upon the double plea that it was no more dangerous for her than for Grant, and that, whether or no, her proper place was beside her husband.

As for Grant, he acted with his usual decision, first dashing the window wide open, and next stooping to raise his friend and convey him into a presumably more healthy atmosphere ; and if any additional motive beyond solicitude for the sufferer were needed to impel him to this step he had it in a curious sickly feeling of lassitude and languor which he felt stealing over himself. He raised the doctor in his arms and, notwithstanding the increasing sensation of feebleness and numbness which oppressed him, staggered with his burden into the outer air of the courtyard, closely followed of course by Mrs. Henderson.

The patient was then conveyed to his own room and laid on his bed. He could do nothing but shiver and moan and cower down among the coverings.

The little party were almost beside themselves with anxiety and terror, which feelings were increased when poor Mrs. Henderson exhibited symptoms of a similar character.

As for Grant, he was thoroughly alarmed ; for not only did the feeling of feebleness increase, but he also found himself gradually becoming the victim of a blind, unreasoning terror for which the term "*abject cowardice*" afforded but a very inadequate description. Fully alive, however, to the possibly critical state of affairs, he battled desperately against the influences at work upon him, and, with infinite patience, at length succeeded in extorting from Henderson a few suggestions toward the adoption of remedial measures, which he put in force for the benefit of the doctor, next for Mrs. Henderson—who had also succumbed to a similar though a much milder attack—and lastly for himself.

Nothing that was done, however, appeared to be of the slightest service, the symptoms continuing with unmitigated severity for fully eight hours, after which they gradually subsided. Grant was quite himself again by noon

next day; Mrs. Henderson recovered a few hours later; but as for the doctor, it was fully a week before he entirely shook off the effects of the attack.

In less than twenty four hours from his first seizure he had sufficiently recovered to give an explanation of the singular affair to the following effect. He had, it would seem, been investigating the nature of a hitherto unknown plant growing in considerable abundance upon the island, and had found it to possess several very remarkable qualities, some at least of which he believed might be rendered of the utmost value in medical practice. Anxious to make his researches thoroughly exhaustive he had, upon the day of the catastrophe, been distilling the essence of the plant; and, his task completed, he was in the act of bottling the extract for future examination when its peculiarly pleasing fragrance caused him to take several deep inhalations from the flask.

He had hardly done so when he felt his strength rapidly leaving him, and he had only time to deposit the phial, open, upon his table and stagger to a chair when something very like a fit of paralysis seized him. He at once cried out for help; but by the time that his cries had evoked a response his nerves had begun to give way, and in a very few minutes he was enduring such an agony as words utterly failed him to describe.

His first act, when he was sufficiently recovered to move about once more, was to secure the phial containing the liquid which had done all the mischief, and—with Nicholls to manage the punt—go right out to sea, where, hastily uncorking the bottle, he flung it as far from him to leeward as possible, at the same moment ordering his companion to give way for home again with all speed.

This was done whilst the terror of his attack was still upon him; but it was not in the nature of a man of Henderson's training to give way for long to so irrational a fear as that which prompted this action, and in less than a month afterward he had, with the adoption of all proper precautions, secured another and far more liberal supply of the singular essence, with a view to future experiments and analysis.

CHAPTER XXIX.—THE MALAYS.

MEANWHILE, the work at the shipyard was pushed forward with all possible energy, and to such good purpose that in an incredibly short time, all things considered, the timbers for the new boat were raised into position and secured, the planking carried up to the gunwale, the deck laid and calked, the joiners' work advanced, and the spars put in hand.

Everybody was in the highest possible spirits, for they saw the end of their labors rapidly approaching; they were, moreover, not only pleased but absolutely proud of their work, for, though of course only amateurs, they had wrought so carefully and conscientiously that everything was finished off not only as strongly but also as neatly as if they had every one served an apprenticeship to the handicraft.

Then the little vessel herself was a perfect beauty; graceful in shape, notwithstanding her extreme breadth of beam; powerful, yet buoyant; and

with lines so cunningly molded that while it would doubtless require a good strong breeze to show her off to the utmost advantage, Nicholls and Manners—who might both be expected to know a good hull when they saw it—confidently predicted that she would prove very nimble even in light airs.

And so confident were they of her sea going powers that they averred, again and again, they would not be afraid to face in her even such a hurricane as that which had robbed them of poor Captain Blake; indeed, they even went the length of volunteering to take her half around the world to New York after she should have accomplished the primary mission of her existence in conveying the party to a civilized port.

Matters were in this satisfactory state, the work having reached such a stage of advancement that the rigging of the *Petrel*—as they had decided to name the little cutter—had already been begun, and some talk was being indulged in of hopes that the launch might be accomplished within the following week, when, on a bright Sunday afternoon, Grant started for the main island, taking the two children with him, the object of the little party being to gather a few of the strangely shaped and exceedingly beautiful shells to be found on the sea beach, as mementoes of their long sojourn on Refuge Island.

The ladies preferred to remain at home, deciding that the day was far too hot for walking exercise; and the doctor remained with them for company.

It was getting on toward sunset—indeed, the sun had already disappeared behind the high ground to the westward of the fort—and the doctor with his two fair companions had ascended to the flat, rampart-like roof of the building, to enjoy the cool, refreshing breeze and watch for the return of the shell gatherers, when the sound of a musket shot, quickly followed by some five or six others, broke upon the air with startling effect, and immediately afterwards the head of a lofty triangular sail glided into view from behind some tall bushes which had hitherto concealed its approach.

That a strange craft of some sort was in the river was the first idea which presented itself to Henderson's mind; that Grant—who was unarmed—and the children were but too probably at that moment crossing from the main, and consequently in full view from the deck of the strange craft, was the next; and that the firing must necessarily have proceeded from the unlooked for visitor and be an indication of hostility, possibly directed against Grant and the youngsters, was the third—the three ideas following each other with the rapidity of a lightning flash.

To these succeeded a fourth—the Malays!

So long a time had elapsed since poor Blake had arrived with his alarming intelligence respecting the propinquity of these rascals and his disquieting suggestions as to a possible visit from them, that, though his anxious watch had been for some time maintained, the uninterrupted absence of any alarming indications had at length resulted in so complete a relaxation of vigilance that even the very existence of these pests of the eastern seas had been forgotten.

What if the wretches were upon them now? It seemed only too probable.

As these thoughts darted through Henderson's brain, and with them the frightful suggestion that those three—the unarmed man and the two helpless children, one of them *his*—might at that moment be beset by a cruel and bloodthirsty foe, a cold shudder went through his frame, and hurriedly speaking to his companions a few words which he intended should be reassuring, but which his manner rendered quite the reverse, he dashed down the inner stairway to the courtyard, and seizing Grant's repeating rifle, which he knew to be loaded, and directing Manners and Nicholls—who had rushed out of their room at the sound of the firing—to arm themselves and follow him, he rushed up to the roof again. Descending to the ground by the outer ladder, he hurried in the direction of the creek.

He had not advanced in this direction much beyond a hundred yards, along the pathway through the brush, when a child's screams—little Lucille's—smote upon his distracted ear, and, darting forward in a very frenzy of apprehension, as he sprang round a bend in the path the poor child, her head uncovered and her long fair hair streaming behind her, her sweet eyes wild with terror, and her little hands outstretched, rushed up to him and with an inarticulate cry of joy sank exhausted and almost lifeless at his feet.

Behind her, not a dozen yards distant, followed a fierce looking Malay, his parted lips revealing the white teeth clenched in the eagerness of pursuit, his cruel black eyes gleaming with the ferocious joy of anticipated success, and with a murderous looking creese with a long blade uplifted in readiness to strike the moment he should have brought the poor innocent little victim within reach of his lean muscular arm.

To spring over the prostrate form of his darling child, thus placing himself between her and her pursuer, while he raised his rifle to his shoulder, was an act of such lightning-like rapidity with Henderson that he and his foe were almost within striking distance before he could check his career.

The next instant the crack of his rifle rang out sharp and clear, and the Malay, with a convulsive bound, crashed face downward at his feet.

Breathless with excitement and the exertion of his short run, his teeth clenched, and the fierce eagerness for battle suddenly awakened to full activity within him, the doctor stood waiting impatiently for the next foe to present himself.

CHAPTER XXX.—LUCILLE'S STORY.

DR. HENDERSON stood breathless with excitement and suspense for some minutes after his victory over the first Malay, momentarily expecting fresh foes to appear.

But none came; only Manners and Nicholls now appeared upon the scene with their rifles in their hands, and eager questions in their eyes and on their lips for an explanation of the sudden and tragic turn of affairs.

To them in a few terse words Henderson stated what had already taken place, adding an expression of his apprehension that Grant and little Percy

had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and finally directing the two men to advance with caution as far as possible with the view of ascertaining the whereabouts of the missing ones, and of affording them help if help were indeed still possible, and, when they had done all that they could to the best of their judgment, to return to the fort with intelligence.

Having thus dismissed his companions, the doctor tenderly raised the now insensible Lucille in his arms, and, pressing her to his breast with a sob of inarticulate gratitude for her preservation, he wended his way back to the fort with a heavy, grief stricken heart, wondering meanwhile how he could best meet the anxious inquiries which he knew would be made by poor Mrs. Grant.

As he approached the fort he saw the two ladies watching for him ; and anxious not to unduly alarm them, he cried out—referring to Lucille—as soon as he had approached within shouting distance :

“ It is all right ; she is not hurt, only frightened a little. Get her bed ready.”

Upon hearing this, Mrs. Grant, supposing that her husband and Percy were following at their leisure, hurried away to prepare Lucille's bed for her, leaving Mrs. Henderson to receive her child.

This afforded the doctor an opportunity which, to speak the truth, was most welcome to him. He knew from experience the consummate tact which women are wont to exercise in the breaking of bad news, and he resolved forthwith to delegate to his wife the task to which he had been looking forward with so much mental perturbation.

So, as soon as he reached his wife's side, he said hastily :

“ Look here, Rose dear, you need not be alarmed. With the exception of being frightened very nearly out of her wits, poor child, there is nothing wrong with Lucille ; she has swooned with terror, but I can soon put her all right again. The Malays, however, have landed on the island ; and I am dreadfully afraid they have got Grant and poor little Percy, but we can know nothing for certain until the return of Manners and Nicholls, who have gone forward to reconnoiter. Poor Mrs. Grant is certain to inquire presently for her husband and child, so I want you to go to her *now*. Break to her as gently as possible what I have just told you, laying stress at the same time upon the fact that we *know* nothing certainly as yet, and that matters may turn out much better than we apprehend. See ! there she is. Now go to her and be as gentle as you can.”

Full of sympathy, Mrs. Henderson at this hurried away upon her painful errand ; whilst her husband, as soon as the coast was clear, made his way down to his own room with the unconscious Lucille.

Arrived there, he laid the child upon her bed, and then opened the compact medicine chest which, on leaving New York, he had happily taken the precaution of adding to his personal outfit, and this done he forthwith set about the task of restoration.

The task proved more difficult and of longer duration than he had anticipated ; and before success rewarded his efforts his wife rejoined him, in tears.

"Well," he said nervously, and without desisting a moment from his occupation, "how have you managed?"

"Oh, Duncan!" sobbed Mrs. Henderson, "it was dreadful! Poor dear Ida is quite prostrated with grief and terror, though she did, and is still doing her best to bear up under the awful agony of suspense. Fancy, both husband and child—oh, it is horrible! Can *nothing* be done to save them?"

"Nothing, just now, I fear," was the gloomy response. "You see there are but three fighting men of us now, and we do not know how many of the enemy there are. It is quite useless to attempt the devising of plans until the other two return with intelligence; *then*, indeed, we will see what can be done. And it shall go hard but we will rescue them somehow. Where did you leave Mrs. Grant?"

"In her own room on her knees, praying for her lost ones; it is all she can do, poor soul. Ah! the dear child is reviving at last, is she not?"

"Yes, yes," answered Henderson hurriedly. "Now reach me that glass of medicine from the table. Thanks. Here, Lucille, my dear, drink this, little one, it will do you good."

A faint tinge of returning color at length appeared in the child's pale cheeks and lips. This had been succeeded by a fluttering sigh or two, and then her eyes had opened suddenly with a look of terror, which had given place to one of joy and relief as she recognized her father and mother bending over her. Upon this Henderson had gently raised her and promptly administered the draft which he had prepared.

Presently the little creature spoke. "Oh, mamma," she exclaimed looking somewhat wildly about her, "is it morning? Is it time to get up? I have had such a dreadful dream——"

"There; never mind your dream; forget all about it, and try to go to sleep again," said Mrs. Henderson soothingly; "it is not quite time to get up yet."

"Yes; go to sleep again like a good girl," agreed Henderson; "but you can tell us your dream first, dear, if you very much wish to do so. You forget," he added in an undertone to his wife; "she may be able to throw a good deal of light upon the state of affairs, and afford us information of the last importance. What was your dream, darling?"

"Oh," began the child, "I dreamt that we—Mr. Grant and Percy and I, you know—had been to the beach gathering shells; and as we were coming back in the boat a great ship suddenly came round the corner, full of ugly, wicked men; and they fired guns at us, and one of them hit Mr. Grant, for I saw the blood running down his face. They came after us in a boat, and were quite near us when we reached the creek; and then Mr. Grant told Percy and me to run home as fast as ever we could; and he took one of the boat's oars and got out and stood on the beach, and looked as if he was going to fight the men. So Percy took my hand, and we ran—oh, ever so fast; and I looked around and saw Mr. Grant fighting all the men with the oar; and then we turned a corner, and I felt tired and wanted to stop; but Percy wouldn't let me, and we kept on running, and I began to cry. And just as

I wanted to stop again we heard somebody running after us, and I thought it was Mr. Grant, but it wasn't; it was one of the ugly men out of the ship; and he had a long knife in his hand. So we ran faster, and then Percy fell down; but I ran on, and the ugly man caught Percy, and—oh mamma!" Here the poor-little creature's eyes filled with tears, and the frightened look returned to them. "*Was it a dream, or did it really happen?*"

"It really happened, dear," answered Henderson, who made it a point of never deceiving his child about anything; "it really happened; but never mind; you are with us now, you know, and quite safe, so lie down and try to go to sleep. And do not trouble about Percy; we will have him and his papa both safe back with us tomorrow morning, please God! What a horrible experience for the poor child—and what dreadful news about those two!" he murmured to his wife, as Lucille sank back and closed her eyes again under the influence of the soothing draft he had administered. "Fancy that poor little fellow Percy in the hands of those fiends. Hark! is not that Manners' voice hailing outside? Stay here with Lucille and hold her hand; it will soothe her, and I will go and lower the ladder."

With that Henderson hurried away.

CHAPTER XXXI.—AN ANXIOUS NIGHT.

ARRIVED at the head of the staircase, Henderson approached the parapet, and, leaning over, peered down into the gathering darkness.

"Is that you, Manners?" he asked, seeing a couple of figures standing close underneath him.

"Ay, ay, sir; here we are," answered Manners for himself and his companion. "Will you kindly lower the ladder, please, doctor?"

The ladder was lowered, and in another moment Nicholls made his appearance above the parapet, closely followed by Manners, who immediately hauled up the ladder after him.

"Well," questioned Henderson impatiently, seeing that neither of the men evinced a disposition to speak; "well, what is the news?"

"The worst, sir, the very worst," answered Manners, with unusual emotion. "They've got both Mr. Grant and little Percy; and, would you believe it, sir? The fiends have actually been ill treating the poor little fellow, just for the sake, seemingly, of tormenting his father."

Henderson groaned aloud in his bitterness of spirit on hearing this.

"It's awful, isn't it, sir?" continued Manners, grinding his teeth with rage. "Nicholls here wanted to open fire upon them, there and then, and board in the smoke—dash in among them in the midst of the confusion, sir, and see if we couldn't cut the two of them adrift and bring them off with us. There's nothing would have suited me better, for it made fairly mad to see the brutes strike that poor little innocent child, and he and his father lashed to a couple of trees; but it wouldn't do—it *wouldn't* do, sir; there were too many of them for us. I counted twenty seven of them, all told, after the second party had come ashore from the proa. We couldn't have done any good. And, beside, there were you and the ladies to be thought of. So, after we

had watched them for some time, I thought our best plan would be to come back here and consult with you, especially as they seemed to be getting ready to beat up our quarters. But we're determined, Nicholls and I, to have a slap at them some time tonight in some shape or form, and the only question is, how is it best to be done?"

Henderson stretched out a hand to each of them, which was cordially grasped as he said huskily,

"Thank you, thank you, my staunch and trusty friends, both; we *will* have a slap at them, as you say. But we must do nothing hastily or without careful consideration—the issues involved are too many, the stake too great for us to risk anything by over rashness. Let us each think the matter over carefully. And, meanwhile, as we shall need all our strength, you, Nicholls, go down and bring us up something to eat and drink, as this may be our only chance to snatch a morsel of refreshment. And whilst he is doing that, perhaps you, Manners, will kindly go down and bring up all the arms and ammunition you can find, so that if the Malays come this way we may be prepared to give them a warm reception. I will keep watch here."

In another minute Henderson was alone on the parapet, with the violet, star studded sky above him, and on every hand the black outline of the high land and the dense growth of trees and bush which hemmed in the fort.

Not a sound met his ear save the continuous *chir* of the myriads of insects with which the island abounded, the distant wash and gurgle of the river, and the mournful sighing of the night breeze through the foliage.

The whereabouts of the Malay camp was faintly indicated by an occasional gleam of ruddy light flashing upon the branches and leaves of a lofty tree in the direction of the creek; and, most gratifying sight of all, away to the eastward the sky was brightening into silvery radiance, showing that the full moon would shortly send her friendly light upon the scene.

The two men soon returned from below in the performance of their several tasks, Manners having had the forethought to load the firearms by the light of a lantern whilst still in the armory.

A few minutes later the moon rose slowly into view from above the low lying land beyond the Malay encampment, flooding the whole scene with soft, subdued light; and Manners then went from loophole to loophole looking for signs of the enemy, but without detecting any indication of their presence.

Though none of them had the slightest appetite for food, ^{the} three men now proceeded to force a little refreshment down their throats, knowing full well that ere long they would have need of all their strength; and, whilst they ate, the conversation naturally turned upon the two hapless prisoners, and the best means for effecting their rescue.

Henderson, indeed, had been able to think of little else since the moment when his child had recovered sufficiently to relate her horrible experience; and whilst turning the matter over in his mind a hopeful thought had suggested itself.

What, he asked himself, could have been the motive of the Malays in making prisoners of those two? Was it not likely that their object was plunder, and the extortion of a ransom? And, if so, he was resolved that *anything* in reason which might be demanded—anything, in short, which should leave the party with the means of defending themselves and providing for their ultimate safety—should be granted. Let the wretches but be persuaded to give up their prisoners unharmed, and to leave the island, and he would not haggle about the price to be paid.

The trio were anxiously discussing together this hopeful view of the matter when watchful Manners, who had stationed himself at the loophole for the purpose of maintaining a ceaseless lookout, suddenly raised his hand warningly, and then pointed in the direction of the pathway leading to the creek.

Springing to their feet, his companions at once stationed themselves in positions which gave them a view of the spot indicated, and, looking intently, they presently detected in the deepest shadow of the bush two or three other shadows, which they speedily identified as human figures, the more readily from the fact that a stray moonbeam occasionally fell upon and glinted from their naked weapons.

The two or three were quickly joined by others, who emerged silently from the pathway through the bush until the watchers were able to count a dozen in all.

"Now, sir, what do you say? Shall we open fire upon them, you and I, with Mr. Grant's repeaters, and Nicholls with his rifle? We could bowl over at least half of them before they could get away," whispered Manners.

"No, no, not for the world," was the answer. "Let us watch them and see if we can get an inkling of what their intentions may be. They at least cannot get at *us* here, and any precipitate action on our part may only make matters worse for poor Grant. Our policy is to keep them in the dark as long as possible as to the number of their opponents."

The Malays having gained—unperceived, they doubtless hoped—the cover afforded by the deep shadow of a dense clump of bush, some two hundred yards distant from the fort, were now clustered closely together therein, apparently engaged upon a close inspection of the curious building before them, and probably comparing notes thereon.

They evidently seemed quite unable to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion with respect to it; and the fact that everything was perfectly dark, silent and motionless about the fort—all the shutters in the exterior walls having been carefully closed—seemed to have excited misgiving rather than confidence in their breasts, for a figure would now and then detach itself from the rest and, on hands and knees, advance cautiously a little way through the long grass into the open, as though to gain a nearer view of the building, and then somewhat precipitately retire again, as though the courage of the adventurer were not equal to the task which he had undertaken.

At length these tactics ceased, and the party, seeming to have finally made up their minds to be at least doing something, began, still clinging tenaciously to the deepest shadow, to move quietly along in a direction which would eventually lead to their discovery of the shipyard.

"That will do," whispered Henderson to his companions as soon as he observed this. "They must not be allowed to reach the shipyard, or they will doubtless set fire to the cutter and everything else there. Now you see that broad strip of moonlit sward over there which they are approaching. The first man who attempts to cross I will fire at; you, Manners, taking the second, I the third, and so on, you and I firing alternately, so that we may take the better aim, and Nicholls reserving his fire in case of a rush. Should such take place we must all fire as rapidly as possible, with the object of checking it. But remember this, both of you, we must each make absolutely certain of his man before pulling trigger. Not a single bullet must be wasted, because in this case it will give an immense advantage if we can impress the enemy with a conviction of the deadly character of our fire. Now, make ready, and recollect I fire first."

As the doctor spoke he carefully leveled his repeating rifle through a loop-hole and brought the sights in line with the trunk of a young sapling which stood full in the moonlight, and in front of which the stealthily advancing figures would have to pass.

His heart throbbed so loudly that he could hear its pulsations—one, two, three, four. The first figure is on the verge of the moonlight; he pauses a moment, looks anxiously at the fort, and then starts at a run to cross to the next patch of friendly shadow.

Poor wretch! he little knows how true an eye is watching behind the sights of a rifle, waiting for him to come in line with the sapling.

Another stride will bring him in line with it—*crack!* a flash of fire, a little puff of smoke, and he flings up his arms as he falls heavily forward into the grass.

A second figure has already emerged into the bright moonlight, following the first; it pauses at the flash and the report, as if about to turn back.

Too late! A second flash, and a second report, and he, too, falls forward on his face.

A third now springs out of the shadow, and stoops forward as if to drag the fallen man back into shelter; but before he can reach him he, too, falls before Henderson's deadly rifle.

That stops the advance effectually, the remaining figures huddling close together where they stand. A most fatal mode of grouping themselves this, for the doctor, whose blood is now fully up, gives the word to fire into them as they stand, and instantly out flashes the fire of three rifles from as many loopholes, followed by such a commotion over there among the shadows as seems to indicate that the fire has not been in vain.

Two more shots, one each from Henderson and Manners, complete the enemy's discomfiture, and a hasty retreat is commenced.

"Follow them up, now; fire away!" exclaims Henderson eagerly; "but take careful aim. Now is our opportunity to teach them a wholesome lesson!"

And follow them up they did, with such deadly persistency that four only out of the twelve succeeded in making good their retreat and regaining the path leading to the cove.

"Splendid!" exclaimed the doctor with pardonable exultation, as he hastened with a parting shot the disappearance of the last figure. "We shall neither see nor hear anything more of those fellows tonight. And now, let us once more see if we cannot hit upon some scheme for the deliverance of those two, our valued friend Grant and his little son."

CHAPTER XXXII.—A TERRIBLE DILEMMA.

DR. HENDERSON was mistaken in supposing that he had seen the last of the Malays for that night; for about two hours later, whilst the three refugees were still anxiously discussing the one question which, above all others, absorbed their thoughts, and were seemingly just as far as ever from any practicable solution of it, a gleam of ruddy light suddenly appeared in the pathway leading from the creek, and a minute later two Malays stepped boldly into the open, one of them holding aloft a lighted torch in one hand and a palm branch in the other, whilst the second man displayed what looked like a sheet of paper.

"A flag of truce!" exclaimed Henderson, as he critically examined the two men through the loophole. "Let them approach; we will hear what they have to say—that is, if they can make themselves intelligible."

The Malays advanced boldly enough across the open toward the fort, evidently quite satisfied that the palm branch afforded them full and absolute protection, and at length came to a halt beneath the walls.

"Well, what do you want?" demanded the doctor of them in English, as he leaned over the parapet.

The one who bore the paper seemed quite to comprehend the purport of the question, for he said something unintelligible in reply, made a motion of writing upon the paper, and then held it aloft toward Henderson.

"Um! a letter," muttered the doctor; "possibly from Grant. Have you any string, either of you?" turning to his companions.

Nicholls happened to have a small ball of spun yarn in his pocket, and this being produced, was unwound and the end lowered down to the letter bearer, who gravely attached the letter, or whatever it was, to it, made an oriental obeisance, and promptly retired, followed by his companion.

"Now, Nicholls," said Henderson, as he hauled up and secured the document, "you mount guard here, keep a sharp lookout, and give the alarm the moment you note anything suspicious. Mr. Manners and I are going below to see what news this letter contains."

That the letter was not from Grant was evident the moment it was opened, for it consisted of nothing more than a series of roughly but vigorously executed drawings.

The first sketch, or that which occupied the top of the sheet, consisted of a straight horizontal stroke with markings underneath it, which were evidently intended to represent waves; and on the center of the horizontal line stood a semicircle with straight lines radiating from it, with a bold single upright stroke to the left of it.

Though roughly executed, there was no doubt this was intended to re-

present either the rising or the setting sun, probably the former, the upright stroke being perhaps intended to indicate the first sunrise, or that of the next morning ; at all events, so Henderson interpreted it.

The second sketch rudely but unmistakably represented the fort, with the exception that, in order to make his meaning perfectly clear, the artist was obliged to add a door. Out of this door several white men were walking, with guns in their hands, which the leading figures were either delivering up, or had already delivered up, to a body of Malays.

A second group of whites and Malays was shown to the right of the sketch, the Malays being represented as handing over to the unarmed whites two prisoners with ropes round their necks and their hands tied behind them. One of the prisoners was an adult, whilst the other was much smaller ; and there could be no doubt whatever that they were intended to indicate Grant and Percy.

The third and last sketch was also a representation of the fort, but in this case it was drawn without a door. Looking over the parapet were a number of white men with guns in their hands, which they were pointing at a party of Malays on the ground below, who in turn were pointing guns at the whites ; while to the right of this picture was drawn another group, a most sinister one, for it represented Grant and Percy bound to two trees and surrounded by a pile of—presumable—branches to which other Malays were in the act of applying *a blazing torch !*

Henderson and Manners studied this document most attentively for some time, and they at length agreed that only one meaning could possibly be intended to be conveyed by it—namely, that if the fort and all it contained, including weapons, were surrendered by sunrise, or sunset—but most probably the former—next day, Grant and Percy would be delivered up by their captors ; but if not, then the fort would be attacked, and the two captives *burnt alive !*

"Why, this is horrible !" exclaimed Henderson, as he finally folded up the document and carefully placed it in his pocket. "We cannot possibly make the unconditional surrender which they demand. It would simply be placing the entire party, Grant and his child included, at the mercy of a pack of treacherous, bloodthirsty scoundrels, who would probably slaughter us all in cold blood as soon as we had delivered up our weapons. On the other hand, it is equally out of the question that we should abandon those two poor souls to the frightful fate with which they are threatened. What is to be done, Manners ?"

"Let us go up on the parapet and talk the matter over with Nicholls, sir," was the reply. "He is a quiet, inoffensive fellow, but thoroughly to be depended upon in a fight, and he is pretty long headed too ; perhaps he may be able to help you out with a suggestion. At all events, sir, you may depend upon it that neither Mr. Grant nor little Percy—poor little chap !—shall be burnt, alive or dead, whilst I can strike a blow to prevent it."

"Come, then," said Henderson, "let us go and hear what Nicholls has to say upon the matter."

But Nicholls seemed completely to lose in horror the long headedness with

which Manners had credited him, as soon as he was made acquainted with the terms of the singular document handed in by the Malays, and beyond the utterance of several very hearty maledictions upon the heads of those scoundrels, and the reiterated declaration that they should kill him before they harmed a hair of the head of either of the prisoners, he had nothing to say.

Henderson was reduced to a condition of absolute despair.

"Leave me, both of you," he at length exclaimed in desperation—"leave me to watch and to think out this matter alone; lie down and rest if you can for an hour or two; husband your strength as much as possible, for we shall have need of it all before sunrise"—he shuddered involuntarily as he uttered the last word—"and fear not, I will call you in good time."

The two men turned, and without a word retired below to their room, leaving the doctor to wrestle alone with the difficult question of what was his actual duty in this terrible strait.

Reader, do not mistake this man's character. No braver or more gallant man—no nobler or stancher friend—ever lived than he. Had he been an unmarried man, or had those two women and that helpless child, his daughter, been in a place of safety, he would have unhesitatingly accepted the hints which Manners and Nicholls had so repeatedly thrown out, and placing himself at their head, would have marched with a light heart against the Malays, and either have rescued the captives or have perished with them.

But the odds against him and his two companions were so great—a little over seven to one even now, after the losses already sustained by the enemy—that he felt that he *dared* not indulge in any hope of success, especially as those odds would be so greatly increased by even *one* casualty on his side; and if failure ensued, what would be the result to them all, including the women and the child still safe in the shelter of the fort? It would not bear thinking about.

"God help me!" he cried in his despair. "*What shall I do?*"

The minutes dragged by while he sat there motionless on the roof, with his head bowed down and his face between his hands.

At last he sprang to his feet. A look of determination had replaced the helpless expression that his face had worn. He had resolved upon a plan of action. It was a desperate one, but he had decided to risk his life and the lives of his friends in the attempt to carry it to success.

Harry Collingwood.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

SLEEP'S FAVORITE.

CARE keeps his watch in every old man's eye;
And where care lodges sleep will never lie;
But where unbruised youth, with unstuffed brain,
Doth couch his limbs, there golden sleep doth reign.

—*Shakspeare.*

LIVING IT DOWN.

The deed that cost John Jeffreys months of misery—From pillar to post in quest of daily bread—
The remorseless fate that pursued a tarnished name.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED.

WHILE away at boarding school, John Jeffreys, during a game of football, accidentally injures a boy so badly that his life is despaired of. Jeffreys thereupon runs away from Bolsover and returns to his guardian in York, who turns him adrift, after informing him that the money left for him by his father has been lost through an unfortunate speculation. Jeffreys finally finds a position as under teacher in Galloway House, a school for little boys, conducted by Mrs. Trimble. The boys take to him, which arouses the ire of Mrs. Trimble's son Jonah, who abstracts from his pocket a letter speaking of young Forrester, the boy injured at school. Jeffreys is once more cast on the cold charities of the world, which throws him only one sop, in the shape of Julius, his guardian's dog, who has been abandoned when Mr. Halgrove moves away leaving not a trace behind. Jeffreys tramps his way to Grangerham, where he can find out but little about Forrester, and then, seeking refuge for the night in a tumble down shed, overhears a plot to abduct Percy Rimbolt, the fourteen year old son of a wealthy family in the neighborhood. With the assistance of the dog, Julius, he frustrates this and restores Percy to his home.

Mr. Rimbolt takes a fancy to Jeffreys and appoints him to the post of private librarian at a salary of a hundred pounds a year. He gets on famously with Percy, and is treated with marked favor by Raby Atherton, Percy's cousin. But Mrs. Rimbolt dislikes the newcomer and neglects no opportunity to humiliate him. During the holidays Mrs. Scarfe and her son arrive on a visit, and in the young man Jeffreys recognizes a schoolmate at Bolsover, one fully cognizant of the Forrester affair. Some time later, after the household has moved to London, Scarfe writes to Mrs. Rimbolt, telling, in exaggerated fashion, why Jeffreys left Bolsover. Mr. Rimbolt, who has been made acquainted with the whole history and elected to take Jeffreys for what he is and not for what he was, is away, and as Mrs. Rimbolt requests the librarian to leave the house within half an hour, he has no choice but to obey. Once more adrift, he wanders about London, and is soon on the verge of starvation. One night he saves a man who has tried to drown himself and who proves to be Jonah Trimble. Jeffreys cares for him as well as he can, and then coming back one day to their poor shelter finds Jonah dead and a note from the "angel" he has talked of as visiting him, saying that he passed away peacefully, and the writing is that of Raby Atherton. But Jeffreys' pride will not suffer him to reveal his whereabouts, even though he sees an advertisement of Mr. Rimbolt's asking for the information. He does call on a firm of attorneys, through whom Raby's father is seeking news of Gerrard Forrester, and tells all he knows, but absolutely refuses to see their principal. In his poor home at Star Alley he makes himself of use to the other lodgers, and on the death of a poor woman adopts her two little boys. Shortly after this a fire breaks out in the neighborhood and Jeffreys saves a bed-ridden inmate of the burning house and brings him to his own attic. As the fellow slowly opens his eyes, his rescuer recognizes young Forrester.

CHAPTER XLII.—AT LAST.

RABY had come home with a strange story from Storr Alley that afternoon. She was not much given to romance, but to her there was something pathetic about this man "John" and his unceremonious adoption of those orphan children. She had not seen anything exactly like it, and it moved both her admiration and curiosity.

**This story began in the October, 1896, issue of THE ARGOSY. The seven back numbers will be mailed to any address on receipt of 70 cents.*

She had heard much about "John" from the neighbors, and all she had heard had been of the right sort. Jonah had talked bitterly of him now and then, but before he died he had acknowledged that John had been his only friend. Little Annie had never mentioned him without a smile brightening on her face; and even those who had complaints to pour out about everybody all round, could find nothing to say about him. Yet she seemed destined never to see him.

Little Tim, when she had entered the attic that morning and found the two desolate babies in possession, had replied, in answer to her natural inquiry, "John ran away; he's afraid of you; he don't like ladies. He's coming back." She stayed and did what she could for the friendless orphans, and tried to brighten the room by a few feminine touches. She half hoped he might return before she had done, but he did not; and when she left, the baby was asleep on the bed, and Tim perched on his look out at the window seat, where Jeffreys found them ten minutes later.

"Perhaps," suggested her father, to whom she narrated her adventures, "your shy friend has his reasons for keeping in the background. He may be an amiable criminal in hiding."

"A criminal could not look after two stray babies like that," said Raby.

"Well, it is curious and interesting. 'One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,' you know. So the unknown John, whatever else he is, is a brother, and deserves to be respected. I hope his shyness, however, may not take the very awkward turn which Jeffreys' has. Wilkins tells me he took fright directly when even my name was introduced; and he wouldn't be surprised if he disappears altogether now."

"Oh, father! Then we have really done more harm than good?"

"That's a cheerless way of putting it. He has promised to call again next week, and if nothing occurs to terrify him meantime, he may still do it. But Wilkins says there seems no getting at him. He will talk about Forrester, but when he comes to himself, he shuts up like a snail into his shell."

The next day, at her usual time, Raby turned her steps to Storr Alley. Groups of people stood about in the court, and it was evident, since she was last there, something unwonted had happened. A fireman's helmet, at the other end of the alley, in the passage leading to Driver's Court, told its own tale; and if that was not enough, the smell of fire and the bundles of rags and broken furniture which blocked up the pathway, were sufficient evidence.

The exiles from Driver's stared hard at the young lady as she made her way through the crowd; but the people of Storr Alley treated her as a friend, and she had no lack of information as to the calamity of the preceding night.

"Bless you!" said the woman who lived in Jeffreys' tenement, "it was a proper flare up! Three 'ouses burned out afore the ingins come; and then they couldn't do nothink for the crowds!"

"And was any one killed, or hurt?" asked Raby.

"Killed! yes! three or four they say. But, bless you, I don't know nothink of them Driver's people. Don't you have nothink to do with 'em, missy. They ain't decent folk, like us. Look at 'em! There's a nice mess they're making our alley in! Why can't they take their 'ooks somewheres

else? We don't want 'em, I'm sure. Yes, and there'd 'ave been one more dead if it 'adn't been for our John to get him out. More'n any of them would 'a done for us; tipsy brutes! that's what they is, and they ought to block up that there passage way, the Bord 'o Works ought, and let 'em keep theirselves to theirselves; we don't want 'em, I'm sure!"

When she paused for breath, Raby inquired:

"And did John save somebody's life?"

"Yus; a bloomin' cripple, as bad as the rest of 'em, you can take your davy, if he'd 'ad the chance! And there's John that bruised and 'urt it's a disgrace to see, and 'im bein' so good to them babies, too, and all that!"

Raby heard her out. There was a lot more to tell. Then she said:

"Well, I dare say I shall see you again, Mrs. Brook. I'll call and see some of my friends now."

"You better give a look in at John's. It's my notion things is queer up there."

Raby paid several visits on her way up. Then, with some trepidation, she knocked at the door of the garret.

There was no reply from within till she turned the handle, and said:

"May I come in?"

Then a voice replied:

"Yes, if you like," and she entered.

It was a strange scene which met her eyes as she did so.

A lad was stretched on the bed awake, but motionless, regarding with some anxiety a baby who slumbered, nestling close to his side. On the floor, curled up with his face to the wall, lay a man, sleeping heavily; while Tim, divided in his interest between the stranger on the bed and the visitor at the door, stood like a little watch dog suddenly put on his guard.

"May I come in?" said Raby again, timidly.

"Here she is!" cried Tim, running to her; "John's asleep, and he," pointing to the figure on the bed, "can't run about."

"Correct, Timothy," said the youth referred to, "I can't—hullo!"

This last exclamation was caused by his catching sight of Raby at the door. He had expected a lodger; but what was this apparition?

"Please come in," said he, bewildered; "it's a shocking room to ask you into, and—Timothy, introduce me to your friend."

Raby smiled; and how the crippled lad thought it brightened the room!

"Tim and I are friends," said she, lifting up the child to give him a kiss.

"I'm afraid you are very badly hurt. I heard of the fire as I came up."

"No, I'm all right; I'm never very active. In fact, I can only move my hands and my head, as Timothy says. I can't run, I'm a cripple. I shouldn't be anything if it wasn't for Jeff. Hullo, Jeff! Wake up, old man!"

Raby started and turned pale as she raised her hand to prevent his waking the sleeper.

"No, please don't wake him; what did you say his name was?"

"Jeffreys—John Jeffreys—commonly called Jeff. He hauled me out of the fire last night, and guessed as little at the time who I was as I guessed who he was. I can't believe it yet. It's like a——"

"You haven't told me your name," said Raby faintly.

"Gerrard Forrester, at your service. Hullo, I say, are you ill? Hi, Jeff, wake up, old man; you're wanted."

Raby had only time to sink to a chair and draw Tim to her, when Jeffreys suddenly woke and rose to his feet.

"What is it Forrester, old fellow, anything wrong?" said he, springing to the bedside.

"I don't know what's the matter—look behind you."

CHAPTER XLII.—FORRESTER'S STORY.

"WHY did she cry?" asked Tim presently, when she had gone. "I know; because of that ugly man," said he, pointing to Forrester.

"Excuse me, young man, I have the reputation of being good looking; that cannot have been the reason. But, Jeff, I'm all in a dream. Who is she; and how comes she to know you and me? And, as Timothy pertinently remarks, 'Whence these tears?' Tell us all about it before the baby wakes."

Jeffreys told him. The story was the history of his life since he had left Bolsover; and it took long to tell, for he passed over nothing.

"Poor old man," said Forrester, when it was done; "what a lot you have been through!"

"Have I not deserved it? That day at Bolsover——"

"Oh, for goodness sake, don't go back to that. You know it was an accident, and what was not an accident was the fault of my own folly. That night I awoke and saw you standing at the door I knew that you had already suffered as much as I had."

"That was the last time I saw you. You forget I have still to hear what happened to you afterwards."

"It's pretty easily told. But I say, Jeff, what did you say her name was?"

"Raby Atherton," said Jeffreys, smiling. This was about the twentieth time the boy had broken in with some question about her. "She is the daughter of your guardian, Colonel Atherton, who was your father's comrade in Afghanistan. Some day she will tell you the story of a battle out there which will make you proud of being Captain Forrester's son. But I want to hear about you."

"Just one minute. Then you knew she visited about here, but she had no idea you were here."

"No, none."

"Why didn't you let her know?"

"Oh, that's a long story, too," said Jeffreys, coloring.

"And an interesting one also, I guess," said Forrester. "Anything you want to hear about—hang the baby, he's awake!"

It was all up with story telling that day. The baby took a lot of pacifying, and after him Tim, who had felt out of it all the morning, turned crusty on their hands.

It was dark before peace reigned once more, and then Forrester told his story.

"I was taken home to Grangerham, you know. My grandmother was ill at the time, and just starting south, so I was left in charge of my old nurse. She was an awful brick to me, was that old soul, and I don't believe I know yet all she did and put up with for me.

"The doctors at Grangerham couldn't make anything of me. One said I'd be cutting about again in a few weeks, and another said I'd be buried in a few days. It's hard to decide when doctors disagree at that rate, and old Mary gave it up, and did what was the best thing—kept me quietly at home. Of course we thought that my grandmother had written to my father, but she hadn't, so he can't have heard for ages. We heard of my grandmother's death presently, and then made the pleasant discovery that she had died in debt, and that the furniture of the house was hired. That pulled Mary and me up short. She had saved a little, and I believe she spent every penny of that to get me up to London to a hospital. I didn't have a bad time of it there for a month or two. I was considered an interesting case, and had all sorts of distinguished fellows to come and look at me, and I lived like a fighting cock all the time. I found, as long as I lay flat, and didn't get knocked about, I was really comfortable, and, what was more, I could use my hands. That was no end of a blessing. I had picked up a few ideas about drawing, you know, at Bolsover, and found now I could do pretty well at it. I believe some of my sketches at the Middlesex were thought well of. Mary came to see me nearly every day. I could see she was getting poorer and poorer, and when at last I was discharged, the rooms she took me to were about as poor as they could be to be respectable.

"I'd hardly been back a week, when, one day after going out to try to sell some of my sketches, she came home ill, and died quite suddenly. I was all up a tree then—no money, no friends, no legs. I wrote to Frampton, but he can't have got my letter. Then I got threatened with eviction, and all but left out in the street, when the person old Mary had sold my sketches to called around and ordered some more. I didn't see him, but a brute of a woman who lived in the house did, and was cute enough to see she could make a good thing out of me. So she took possession of me, and ever since then I've been a prisoner, cut off from the outside world as completely as if I had been in a dungeon, grinding out pictures by the dozen, and never seeing a farthing of what they fetched, except in the food which Black Sal provided to keep me alive. Now and then, in an amiable mood, she would get me a newspaper; and once I had to illustrate a cheap edition of Cook's voyages, and of course had the book to go by. But she never let me write to anybody, or see anybody, and mounted guard over me as jealously as if I had been a veritable goose that laid golden eggs.

"You know the rest. We got turned out when they pulled down the old place, and took refuge in Driver's Alley, a nice, select neighborhood; and there you found me, old man."

"Think of being near one another so long," said Jeffreys, "and never knowing it."

"Ten to one that's exactly what my guardian's daughter is observing to herself at the present moment. I say, Jeff, compared with Driver's Court, this is a palatial apartment, and you are a great improvement on Black Sal; but, for all that, don't you look forward to seeing a little civilization—to eating with a fork for instance, and—oh, Jeff, it will be heavenly to wear a clean collar!"

Jeffreys laughed.

"Your two years' troubles haven't cast out the spirit of irreverence, youngster," said he.

"It *is* jolly to hear myself called youngster," said the boy, in a parenthesis; "it reminds me of the good old days."

"Before Bolsover?" said Jeffreys sadly.

"Look here! If you go back to that again, and pull any more of those long faces, Jeff, I'll be angry with you. Wasn't all that affair perhaps a blessing in the long run? It sent me to a school that's done me more good than Bolsover; and, as for you—well, but for it you'd never have had that sweet visitor this morning."

"Don't talk of that. That is one of the chief drawbacks to my going back to civilization, as you call it."

"A very nice drawback, if it's the only one——"

"It's not; there's another."

"What is that?"

"My babies!"

CHAPTER XLIII.—A CLOUDLESS SKY.

It was a strange, happy night, that last in the Storr Alley garret. Jeffreys had begged Raby to let them stay where they were in peace for that day; and she considerably kept their counsel till the morning. Then she told her father the strange story.

"Two birds with one stone, and such a stone?" ejaculated the bewildered colonel.

"Four birds, father—there are two babies as well."

"Whew!" said the colonel, "what a holiday I am having!"

"Poor father," said the girl, "it's too bad."

"Oh, well. The more the merrier. What's to be done now? We'd better charter a coach and four and a brass band, and go and fetch them home in haste. If they wait until tomorrow we would have a triumphal arch."

"How frivolous you are, father! We must get them away with as little fuss as possible. I arranged with Mr. Jeffreys that he would bring Mr. Forrester here in a cab this morning."

"And the babies?"

"He will go back for them afterwards."

"Well, as you like; but what about Percy and the Rimbolts?"

"Percy was to go out of town today, you know, and will not be back till tomorrow. By that time we shall be able to find out what Mr. Jeffreys would like best."

"Oh, very good. We'll wait till his Royal Highness signifies his pleasure, and meanwhile our relatives and friends must be avoided—that's what you mean?"

"No," said Raby, coloring; "but you know how easily frightened he is." The colonel laughed pleasantly.

"All right, Raby; they shall be let down as easily as you like. Now shall I be in the way when they come, or shall I make myself scarce? And, by the way, I must go at once and get a perambulator and feeding bottles and all that sort of thing. How many times a day am I to be sent out to take them for walks?"

"You're too silly for anything," said Raby dutifully.

She was grateful to him for making things so easy, and by covering her own ill disguised embarrassment by this adroit show of frivolity.

There was no frivolity in the manner in which the gallant soldier welcomed his old comrade's son, when, an hour later, he entered the house, borne in the strong arms of his friend. A couch was ready for him, and everything was made as simple and homelike as possible. Jeffreys stayed long enough to help the boy into the civilized garments provided for him, and then quietly betook himself once more to Storr Alley.

The curiosity roused by the departure of "Black Sal's Forrester" in a cab was redoubled when, late that afternoon, Jeffreys was seen walking out of the alley with the baby in one arm and Tim holding on to the other. He had considered it best to make no public announcement of his departure. If he had, he might have found it more difficult than it was to take the important step. As it was, he had to run the gauntlet of a score of inquisitive idlers, who were by no means satisfied with the assurance that he was going to give the children an airing.

The general opinion seemed to be that he was about to take the children to the poor house, and a good deal of odium was worked up in consequence. Some went so far as to say he was going to sell or drown the infants; and others, Driver's Alley refugees, promised him a warm reception if he returned without them.

He neither returned with nor without them. They saw him no more. But it was given to the respectable inhabitants of a crescent near Regent's Park, about half an hour later, to witness the spectacle of a big young man, carrying a small baby in his arms, and a big one on his shoulder—for Tim had turned restive on his hands—walk solemnly along the footpath till he reached the door of Colonel Atherton's, where he rang.

The colonel and Raby had a queer tea party that evening. When the meal was ended, Jeffreys was called upon to put his infants to bed, and a wonderful experience to those small mortals was the warm bath and feather bed to which they were severally introduced. Jeffreys was thankful that the baby was restless, and gave him an excuse for remaining in retirement the most of the evening. At length, however, silence reigned; and he had no further call to tarry.

Entering the parlor, he perceived almost with a shock that Mr. Rimbolt was there. He had called in accidentally, and had just been told the news.

"My dear fellow," said he, as he took his old librarian's hand, "how we have lounged for this day!"

Raby and her father were occupied with Forrester, and Jeffreys and his old employer were left undisturbed.

What they talked about I need not repeat. It chiefly had reference to Storr Alley and to Percy.

"He is down at Watford seeing a friend tonight. We expect him back tomorrow morning. How happy he will be! By the way," added Mr. Rimbolt a moment afterwards, "now I remember, there is a train leaves Euston for Overton at 12.30, half an hour after Percy's train comes in. How should you like to meet him, and run down with him for a week or two to Wildtree? He sadly wants a change, and my books sadly want looking after there. You will have the place to yourselves; but perhaps you won't mind."

Jeffreys flushed with pleasure at this proposal. It was the very program he would have selected. But for a moment his face clouded as he glanced towards Forrester.

"I don't know whether I ought to leave him."

"He is with his guardian, you know, and could not be in better quarters."

"Then—you know I have—that is, you know—there are two—babies."

Raby, however, when the question was subsequently discussed, expressed herself fully equal to the care of these promising infants until a home could be found for them; and Forrester, for his part, declared that Jeffreys must and should go to Wildtree.

"Can't you see I don't want you any more?" said he. "This sofa's so comfortable, I'm certain I shall sleep a fortnight straight away, and then my guardian and I have no end of business to talk over, haven't we, guardian? And you'd really be in the way."

So it was settled. The whole party retired early to bed after their exciting day.

Jeffreys slept for the last time between the babies, and could scarcely believe, when he awoke, that he was not still in Storr Alley.

Still less could Tim, when he awoke, realize where he was. For the John he was accustomed to stood no longer in his weather beaten, tattered garments, but in the respectable librarian's suit which he had left behind him at Clarges Street, and which now, by some mysterious agency, found itself transferred to his present room.

Tim resented the change, and bellowed vehemently for the space of an hour, being joined at intervals by his younger brother, and egged on by the mocking laughter of young Forrester, who was enjoying the exhibition in an adjoining chamber.

For once Jeffreys could do nothing with his disorderly infants, and was compelled finally to carry them down, one under each arm, to the sitting room, where Raby came to the rescue, and thus established her claim on their allegiance for a week or so to come.

In a strange turmoil of feeling Jeffreys at midday walked to Euston. Mr. Rimbolt was there with Percy's traveling bag and the tickets, but he did not remain till the train from Westford came in.

"I may be running down to the north myself in about a fortnight," said he; "we can leave business till then—good by."

The train came in at last. Jeffreys could see the boy pacing in a non-chalant way down the platform, evidently expecting anything but this meeting.

His eyes seemed by some strange perversity even to avoid the figure which stood waiting for him; nor was it till Jeffreys quietly stepped in front of him and said "Percy," that they took him in and blazed forth a delighted recognition.

"Jeff," he said, "you've come back—really?"

"Yes, really."

"To stay—for good?"

"For good, old fellow."

Percy heaved a sigh of mighty content as he slipped his arm into that of his friend. And half an hour later the two were whizzing northward on their way to Wildtree with their troubles all behind them.

CHAPTER XLIV.—A FRESH START.

It is supposed to be the duty of every well conducted author, after the curtain has fallen on the final tableau of his little drama, to lift it, or half lift it, for a momentary last glimpse of the principal actors.

I am not quite sure whether this is not an encouragement to laziness on the part of the reader. In most respects he is as well able to picture the future of Jeffreys, and Raby, and Percy, and Tim, as I am.

I cannot show them to you in all the dignity of an honored old age, because they are only a year or two older today than they were when Percy and Jeffreys took that little run together down to Cumberland. Nor can I show them to you, after the fashion of the fairy tale, "married and living happily ever afterwards," because when I met Jeffreys in the Strand the other day, he told me that although he had just been appointed to the control of a great public library in the north, it would still be some months, possibly a year, before he would be able to set up house on his own account.

However, he seemed contented on the whole to wait a bit; and in a long talk we had as we walked up and down the Embankment I heard a good many scraps of information which make it possible to satisfy the reader on one or two points about which he may still be anxious.

Jeffreys and Percy stayed at Wildtree for a month, and that time was one of the happiest both of them ever spent. They did nothing exciting. They read some Aristophanes; and added some new "dodge" to their wonderful automatic bookcase. They went up Wild Pike one bright winter's day and had a glorious view from the top. And on the ledge coming back they sat and rested awhile on a spot they both remembered well. Julius' grave was not forgotten when they reached the valley below; and the "J" upon the stone which marks the place to this day was their joint work for an hour that afternoon.

As for the books, Jeffreys had sprung towards them on his first arrival as

a father springs toward his long lost family. They were sadly in want of dusting and arranging, as for a month or two no one had been near them, and altogether Jeffreys had work enough to keep him busy.

He was not sorry to be busy. For amid all the happiness and comfort of his new return to life he had many cares on his mind.

There was Forrester. He had imagined that if he could only find him, all would be right, the past would be canceled and his bad name would never again trouble him. But as he thought of the helpless cripple, lying there unable to move without assistance, with all his prospects blighted and his very life a burden to him, he began to realize that the past was not canceled, that he had a life's debt yet to pay and a life's wrong yet to atone for. But he bravely faced his duty now. Forrester's letters, which came frequently, certainly did not do much to encourage melancholy reflections.

"I'm in clover here," the boy wrote about a week after Jeffreys had gone north. "My guardian is a trump—and is never tired of telling me about my father. Do you know I'm to have a pension from a grateful country?"

"Here am I writing about myself when I know you are longing to hear about—(turn over leaf and hide your blushes)—the babies! They are tip top. Timothy ever since I got my sword has shown great respect for me, and sits on the pillow while I sketch. By the way, do you recognize inclosed portrait? It's my first attempt at a face—rather a pleasant face too.

"She, by the way, never mentions you, which is an excellent sign; but rather tough on me when I want to talk about you. She occasionally is drawn out to talk about a certain Mr. John at Storr Alley; but, as you know, she only knew about him from hearsay. How's that boy who got hold of you down in Cumberland? Are he and I to be friends or enemies? Tell him I'm game for either, and give him choice of weapons if the latter. But as long as he lets me see you now and then and treats you well, we may as well be friends. I'm flourishing and awfully in love. Stay away as long as you can; you're not wanted here. Good by—remember me to that chap. Tim sends his duty; and *she*, when I mentioned I was writing to you and asked if there was any message, did not hear what I said.—G. F."

There was plenty in this bright letter to give comfort to Jeffreys. He rejoiced humbly in its affectionate tone toward himself. He treasured the portrait. He was gratified at the unenvious references to Percy, and he was relieved at the prospect before his babies.

At the end of a month Mr. Rimbolt wrote to say he was coming down to Wildtree and would be glad if they would meet him at Overton.

They did so, and found that he was not alone. Mr. Halgrove stepped pleasantly out of the train at the same time, and greeted his quondam ward with characteristic ease.

"Ah, Jeffreys—here we are again. I'm always meeting you at odd places. How fresh everything looks after the rain!"

"Mr. Halgrove is my brother in law, you know, Jeffreys," said Mr. Rimbolt, in response to his librarian's blank look of consternation. "I brought him down, as he wanted to see you and have a talk. If you two would like to walk," added he, "Percy and I will drive on and have dinner ready."

"Good hearted fellow, Rimbolt," said Mr. Halgrove.

"Yes," said Jeffreys, greatly puzzled by this unexpected meeting.

"Yes. I told him once casually about an unpleasant ward I once had, whom I rather disliked. I thought he would sympathize with me when I related how delicately I had got rid of him and sent him adrift when it did not suit me to keep him any longer. Would you believe it, Rimbolt wasn't at all sympathetic, but asked what had become of my ward's money! Do take warning, Jeffreys, and avoid the bad habit of asking inconvenient questions. You have no idea of the pain they may cause. Mr. Rimbolt's question pained me excessively. Because my ward's money, like himself, had gone to the bad. That would not have been of much consequence were it not that I was responsible for its going to the bad. It was most inconvenient altogether, I assure you. It made me feel as if I had behaved not quite well in the matter; and you know how depressing such a feeling would be, still more inconvenient at the time when I had this talk with Rimbolt about six months ago. I had just come back from America with my finances in not at all a flourishing condition, so that even if I had been disposed to refund my ward I could not have done it. Happily he was lost. It was an immense relief to me, I can assure you.

"Two months ago my finances looked up. I unexpectedly found myself a man of means again. Rimbolt, who certainly has the knack of making ill timed suggestions, proposed that that would be a good opportunity for making good what properly belonged to my ward. I urged in vain that my ward was lost, and that the money properly belonged to me as a reward for the trouble I had had in the matter. He actually insisted that I should deposit with him as trustee for my ward the full amount of what belonged to him with interest added to date, promising if by any unfortunate accident the fellow should be found to see it into his hands. One's obliged to humor Rimbolt, so I did what he wanted, and that's how it stands. If ever this unprofitable ward turns up he'd better keep his eye on Rimbolt.

"There, you see, Jeffreys, that's just a little anecdote to show you how easy it is, by being inconsiderate, for one person to make another uncomfortable. But now tell us how you like Cumberland."

Jeffreys admitted that he was much pleased with it, and had the tact to suit his humor to that of his guardian, and not refer further to the lost money.

Mr. Halgrove only stayed two days, and then departed for the Great West, where it is possible he may today carry a lighter heart about with him for his latest act of reparation.

One afternoon a week later Jeffreys was walking with Raby in Regent's Park.

It was not exactly a chance walk. They had both been up to the orphanage at Hampstead with the reluctant Tim and his brother, to leave them there in motherly hands till the troubles of infancy should be safely passed.

It was Tim who had insisted on having the escort of both his natural guardians on the occasion; and at such a time and on such an errand Tim's word was law. So they had gone all four in a cab, and now Raby and Jeffreys returned, and with a sense of bereavement, through the park.

Was it accident, or what, which brought them without knowing it to a spot which to each was full of painful memories?

Raby was the first to stop abruptly.

"Let us go another way, Mr. Jeffreys, if you don't mind. I don't like this avenue."

"No more do I," said Jeffreys, who had stopped too.

"Why?" she said.

"Need I say?"

"Not if you don't like."

"I have not walked down here since an afternoon last October. There was a sudden storm of rain——"

"What! Were you here then?"

"I was. You did not see me."

"You saw me, then. I was with Mr. Scarfe."

"Yes. You were——"

"Miserable and angry," said she, her face kindling at the recollection.

He darted one glance at her, as brief as that he had darted on the afternoon of which they spoke.

Then he had read nothing but despair for himself; now, though her eyes were downcast and her voice angry, he thought he read hope.

"Suppose," said he, in a little while, "instead of running away from the path, we just walk down it together. Would you mind? Are you afraid?"

"No," said she, smiling. And they walked on.

Talbot Baines Reed.

THE END.

WHEN LOVE BEGINS.

WHEN love begins the pulses go
No longer sluggish, tame or slow,
But looking down from heights of bliss
Man learns to know what rapture is,
And all his feelings finer grow.

How very gay the ardent beau,
How all his thoughts with fervor glow!
What wondrous happiness is his
When love begins!

Ah, there is one who can bestow
The ecstasy I fain would show——
A beauteous, captivating miss—
You smile, Clarisse? I'll take a kiss,
For by your eyes I see you know
When love begins.

Nathan M. Levy.

A COURAGEOUS COWARD.

The sequel to an unaccepted challenge—Why Little Binks refused to fight the major—The opportunity for his strange revenge and in what manner Binks made use of it.

THEY called him Little Binks in the regiment. Not to his face, though, for almost every one liked him too well. Not that Binks was exactly a small man physically. But he was short—stocky, so to speak—with rather broad shoulders and long arms, disproportionate to his height.

Little Binks had peculiarities—who of us has not? But his were of a nature that in a roistering regiment like the one which he had joined at the opening of the Zulu campaign, made him at first a trifle unpopular with his fellow officers.

Little Binks was alone in the world. He hadn't any one at home, not even a sweetheart. He *had*, so it was whispered, been engaged to a lovely girl who had "thrown him over" for Major Trevitt. And the major of course knew all about it.

The Zulu army had gathered in force near the border of the Mazembi districts. Barrow's mounted infantry, with an artillery corps and three companies of the Thirteenth dragoons, were holding the fortifications only a mile away, anxiously awaiting reinforcements. And there were rumors that the Zulus were meditating a sudden onslaught which should sweep the few handfuls of British invaders from the sandy soil.

A dozen or more of the Thirteenth, among whom were little Binks and Major Trevitt, sat discussing the situation in front of the rude native barracks in the glow and splendor of an African moonlight.

Major Trevitt, a tolerably abstemious man, according to his light, was disposed to be somewhat sentimental, and remarkably self complacent, after having disposed of a trifle more than his usual allowance.

Binks, who sat a little apart, was unusually silent. Perhaps his thoughts were thousands of miles away from Zululand. Possibly he was thinking of the one bright episode in an otherwise lonely life. I mean, of course, the days when the fair but fickle Alice Ritchie had smiled—or seemed to—on his suit. Of course, for a little while he had lived in a fool's paradise, like many a wiser man. But, unlike the wiser man above mentioned, little Binks had never lost his faith in or his love for the girl who had thrown him aside as she would a slightly worn glove. His belief in her was unbounded—he would have died to serve her.

"Alice?" It was Major Trevitt's voice elevated a trifle above its usual pitch in answer to something said by one of those next him—a very intimate friend and fellow officer.

"Well, yes, my boy," he went on in the same audible tones, which somehow little Binks had a fancy were intended for his own ear. "I rather flatter myself that her life, so to speak, is wrapped up in yours truly. Point of fact, she said in her last letter that it would simply break her heart outright if anything happened to your humble servant in this campaign."

Pleasant for little Binks, who firmly believed every word! Major Trevitt's friend was less credulous, perhaps. He coughed drily, and made no immediate response.

"She never cared for Binks, don't you know," continued the major, who was unusually indiscreet this evening. "It was a bit of coquetry just to lead the poor fellow on—little Binks is hardly the figure of a man to——"

"I think you've said quite enough, Major Trevitt!"

Lieutenant Binks seemed quite six feet in height, as, rising from his camp stool, he walked to the side of the astonished officer and broke in upon his conversation.

No need to describe what followed. The angry, sneering reply, the hot words, the blow!

Major Trevitt, whose sunburned cheek was tingling from the contact of little Binks' fingers smartly applied, loudly demanded "the satisfaction due from one gentleman to another," while friends vainly tried to intercede. But to the surprise of all, little Binks would neither fight nor apologize.

"The one is against my principles and the other against my inclination," he said quietly. And the word "coward," I regret to say, was heard from more than one pair of bearded lips—notably from Major Trevitt's. But little Binks only closed his own a little tighter, and retired to his quarters.

It was a little after day dawn on the following morning, when Lieutenant Binks, having posted his videttes under his own personal supervision, rode forward a short distance in the direction of a line of blue gum trees, beyond which the enemy were presumed to be massing in force. But everything looked quiet and peaceful. In fact, Binks saw no sign of life in any direction. He was about bringing out his field glass, when Major Trevitt rode up from an opposite direction at a sharp trot. Little Binks gravely saluted. The major scowled.

"If you want my plain, unvarnished opinion of you, Lieutenant Binks," he said with gathering wrath, "I repeat what I said last night—you're an infernal coward and——"

All at once from a ruined kraal, half hidden in the underbrush between the two officers and the blue gum tree forest, there belched forth a tremendous fusillade. Major Trevitt wheeled his horse sharply round, but a ball struck the animal in the fore shoulder, while another passed through the major's bridle arm, shattering the bone.

Little Binks sprang from his saddle like a cat, just in time to prevent the officer from being crushed by his falling steed.

"Save yourself, you thundering fool!" growled the major, as following the volley came a yelling, shrieking throng of half naked Zulus brandishing their assegais, while at the same time another lot, in ambush, kept up a continuous fire.

If Binks heard he did not heed.

"You are wounded—into my saddle, quick!" he exclaimed in tones hardly recognizable, so full of stern command were they.

But the major was a fine figure of a man, while Binks himself was not a particularly light weight. And Binks' horse, by no means a strong one, was entirely unused to carrying double. He balked and reared; in fact, refused duty entirely. There was but one resource—but one life could be saved.

"Good by, Trevitt. God bless you—and Alice. Tell *her* good by."

As one in a dream Major Trevitt heard, or thought he heard, these words uttered in his dulled ear.

By his own account the major only remembered lurching heavily forward to the saddlebow, which he clutched with a literal death grip. The horse relieved of part of his burden, galloped madly forward into the lines, hastened perhaps by the sting of a spent bullet that struck the frightened steed in the counter.

Major Trevitt was in a half unconscious state from pain and loss of blood when helped from the saddle. And it was not until the Zulus had been driven back to the kraal that little Binks was discovered.

In his right hand was a revolver with empty cylinder. Through his heart was an African assegai. And about him lay, grim and ghastly, the lifeless bodies of five of Cetewayo's bravest Zulu warriors.

So little Binks lies asleep under African sands. At his head is a simple gray stone, for which Major Trevitt paid at his own special request. But little Binks' brother officers insisted upon supplying the words. Following his name and the date of his death is this:

"Brave men do not boast or bluster. Deeds, not words, speak for such."

Charles A. McDougall.

A FAIRY TALE.

WE sat on the fence's topmost rail

As the sun sank in the west,

And told each other some fairy tale

Which, when young, we loved the best,

And the long grass rustled at our feet;

Mayhap in its tangle green

Titania, and her courtly suite

Listened unseen.

The twilight gathered—the fields grew dark,

The night let her curtains down,

The stars came out—each tiny spark

Like the jewel of a crown.

The fair moon shone in the heavens above,

And beneath its glory pale

A maiden smiled, for she thought my love

A fairy tale.